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THE HIDDEN PLAYER

WORKS BY ALFRED NOYES

COLLECTED POEMS—3 *Vols.*

WATCHERS OF THE SKY—(Torchbearers—I)

THE ELFIN ARTIST

THE LORD OF MISRULE

A BELGIAN CHRISTMAS EVE

THE WINE-PRESS

TALES OF THE MERMAID TAVERN

SHERWOOD

THE ENCHANTED ISLAND AND OTHER POEMS

THE GOLDEN HYNDE

SOME ASPECTS OF MODERN POETRY—*Prose*

THE HIDDEN PLAYER—*Prose*

BEYOND THE DESERT—*Prose*

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HIDDEN PLAYER

BY

ALFRED NOYES

With best remembrance

Alfred Noyes



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THE HIDDEN PLAYER

THE HIDDEN PLAYER

I

THE TROGLODYTE

"In that old wood, where ghosts of lovers walk
At fall of day,
Gleaning such fragments of their ancient talk
As poor ghosts may,
From leaves that brushed their faces, wet with dew
Or tears, or rain,—
*Look for me, once, lest I should look for you
And look in vain.*"

Dead Man's Morrice.

WE are told by dwellers in our swollen cities that these islands are over-populated. Yet, only a few score miles from London, you may walk for half a day over unfenced hills and never see a human being between yourself and the skyline. There is a stretch of coast in the northwest of England where you might camp for a year with no more conversation than the crying of the seagulls.

Yet a singular drama was once enacted on that lonely coast, a drama so strange that, even when I look back upon my own part in it, I feel as if I were trying to recollect a dream. Then I take a certain old diary from a locked drawer and re-read it till London fades away. The roar of the traffic becomes once more the voice of the sea, the only voice that

can deliver the same message over and over again without wearying the hearer; and the tale I am about to try to relate becomes more vivid than the life around me.

My own share in the story was only that of accidental audience during the crisis, in the summer of 1919, when I was paying a visit to my old college friend, John Ashton. He had recently abandoned his political career, with the complete disgust of an honest man who was "his own worst enemy," and he had gone to live in his lonely old house on the northwest coast. (The place cannot be indicated more clearly for reasons that will be understood later.) He had left no pillar of salt behind him, gazing at London. His wife, ever since the marriage of their only daughter, had pined for her gray-walled garden. Ashton himself was busy with a new book on the Republic of Plato. He was writing it for his own enlightenment apparently, and did not intend to publish it.

"I've had more than enough of what the Muses of the hour call 'publicity,' " he growled, "and when I begin to mistake it for the real thing I hope you'll put a bullet through my head. Politics destroyed my last illusions about the intellectual honesty of this age. Even now I feel as if I had been bludgeoned internally by a gang of hooligans. I've come to live here in order to get my body as far away from them as possible; and I've been tackling Plato to get my mind away from them too."

"Surely it isn't as bad as all that," I said. "You're not going to renounce the world permanently."

"Not this part of it," he said with a laugh, wav-

ing his hand at the gray walls of the garden, where the fruit was forming. "Besides, if solitude is relative, I'm not quite such a hermit as you imagine. There's a recluse in our neighborhood whose remoteness is to mine as a star beyond the Milky Way to the comparatively genial moon."

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Ashton, who wandered in and out of our conversation while she inspected her flowers. "Jack means the Troglodyte. You really ought to meet the Troglodyte."

"He is a very extraordinary creature," Ashton continued. "He lives in a cave—Wreckers' Cave, it's called—about three miles along the coast to the south. It's the most solitary place in the world; and he has lived there for twenty-five years, all alone except for the seagulls, with whom, incidentally, he seems to be on the friendliest terms. I saw him fishing from the reef in front of his cave one day, with pigeon gulls perched all over him."

"I wonder why birds and beasts always prefer cranks to——"

"Sublimely sane people, like the average Londoner?" he interrupted. "Ah, do you really wonder? St. Francis of Assisi would look eccentric enough in a London drawing-room; and his talk would be thought hopelessly insane by every ass that could bray the latest catch-words at him. But who would look the eccentric by all the normal standards of Nature herself, in the fields, or among the mountains? Who would look the more unnatural on this unspoiled sea-coast, a Saint Catherine with bare head and feet, or a London woman who wears shoes that distort her whole body, and jab-

bers like a cage of cockatoos? It all depends on your standards of sanity. In London, of course, the motives and desires of an ape might give a man a place in the Cabinet; and, with equal probability, the motives and desires of an angel would ruin him."

"I've always admired your devotion to lost causes, Jack; but your enthusiasm for the Troglodyte seems to me just a little fantastic. Why on earth should an educated man cut himself off from all the amenities like that?"

"Too like John the Baptist," said Ashton, a little grimly. "Ah, you've just come from London. We lose our souls in the cities. It's in loneliness that men and women loom against the sky. That's why people are afraid of martyrs, I suppose, even when the martyr is hopelessly in the wrong. Hence also," he added, with a chuckle, that showed he had not altogether lost his sense of proportion, "the impressive spectacle of John Ashton, who suffered very comfortably for his opinions, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, by being condemned to read Plato and cultivate his own garden."

"But, seriously," interposed Mrs. Ashton, who thought it was bad for her husband to brood over things, "what Jack says is quite true of the Troglodyte. There's a real cause. It's a most tragic affair."

She spoke with a firm superiority of knowledge that quite crushed the embryonic jests in my mind. Ashton, too, ceased to chuckle, and looked at me with an unusual depth and glow in his eyes.

"The Troglodyte's not a crank, or a martyr, or anything of that kind," he said. "He's one of the

very best men alive to-day. I give you my word that before you go back to London you will be more ready to doubt the sanity of the whole House of Commons than that of my cave-dweller."

"My *dear* Jack, do forget the House of Commons," protested Mrs. Ashton, from behind a rose bush.

"Well. This is a case where a perfectly sound reason exists for the man's unusual way of life, though few men would be really sound enough at heart to act upon it. Doesn't any possible reason occur to you?"

I shook my head.

"Tell him the whole story," said Mrs. Ashton; and, after dinner that night, in his library, by the blazing wood fire, he obeyed her.

"Thirty years ago," he began, "this house belonged to a gentleman farmer named Foley. He had some hundreds of acres—mostly unproductive now. The children of those who used to produce are now city parasites, consuming imports and making the nation borrow money abroad to pay them high wages in order that——"

"My dear Jack, how very complicated," Mrs. Ashton protested again. "Do, please, stick to your muttons."

"Well, Mr. and Mrs. Foley had a son at Oxford. They're all in New Zealand now, I believe, sheep farming. (How will that do for your muttons, Joan?) They also had a niece—Marjorie Foley—a very pretty girl. I've seen her picture."

"Oh, but she was far more than that," said Mrs.

Ashton. "She had the most exquisite Greek profile—a Psyche."

"No. A Proserpine, I'm afraid," said Ashton. "And these were her fields of Enna. She was the daughter of a London doctor, a widower, who spoiled her, thank God; and she used to come down here with a girl friend for a few weeks in the summer. The Troglodyte—his name is Gregory, by-the-bye, Duncan Gregory—was a college friend of young Jim Foley, and he used to come down here for part of the long vacation, too.

"Of course, young Gregory fell in love with Marjorie Foley. The four young people were somewhat in advance of their time—more like the young rebels of the present day in their freedom, but content, one imagines, with simpler pleasures. They used to swim in the little sandy bay off Wreckers' Cave. It was a sort of desert island life, with home comforts just round the corner. They called themselves 'the castaways'; and the cave, of course, was their headquarters.

"They used to spend the whole day down there wandering about the shore in their swimming suits, dashing into the sea and drying themselves in the sun; catching prawns in the rock-pools, fishing for sea-perch off the edge of the reef, and then swimming again.

"Gregory and Marjorie ran the housekeeping, which meant feeding the driftwood fire in the cave, frying the fish, boiling the prawns, making coffee, and spreading the feast on the nice flat rock-table that Gregory uses to-day. They had new-laid eggs and fruit from the farm, of course. Occasionally

a cold roast chicken; and, always, lashings of raspberries and cream for Marjorie, because it was her favorite dish. Very jolly times they must have had, too. Here's a picture, by-the-bye, taken by the other girl with a pin-hole camera, and colored by her own hand, somewhat lavishly. It gives you an idea of the summer-life they led. At other times, I gather, they were perfectly respectable nineteenth-century children."

Ashton took a picture, lightly framed in black, from the table near him. It was a rather cleverly colored photograph of the interior of the cave, taken by a light that streamed through some large aperture outside the picture. It showed the "castaways" trying to look as brown and Samoan as possible, round a somewhat lurid fire. The painting had obviously been done in a humorous vein; but, even so, one caught a hint of what would have been real beauty to an outside observer, in the billows of dusky hair through which Marjorie's profile and one brown arm were allowed to take the firelight. An emerald star, with somewhat exaggerated rays, burned like a mermaid's jewel in the dark wave above her ear.

"That's a little fanciful," said Ashton. "It's intended to represent a certain heirloom (a very costly one, too) that had been left to Marjorie by her great-grandmother. She brought it down to the Foleys to show to them, in the first pride of possession; and I believe they were all rather alarmed that she hadn't lodged it in the Bank of England. But I don't suppose she wore it down at the cave. The slender youth, there, is Gregory; and the mass

of crimson that he is offering to her on a platter is, of course, raspberries. The white club in his left hand is a bottle of cream. The two others are what shadowy figures, for one gathers that they helped to adjust the camera for a time-exposure, then dashed to their places for the picture; but you can just see that they are sitting cross-legged on either side of Gregory's devotional act, and that they are gnawing something which they hold with both hands—chicken-bones, probably.

"The picture was left here with a lot of other rubbish, and, oddly enough, it served as my letter of introduction to the Troglodyte, about three years ago. I used to see him, occasionally, when I happened to walk along the coast; and, one day, in connection with a remark that he made about the fire in the cave, I mentioned it. He said he would like to see the photograph. In fact, he made a point of it, and reminded me several times; so I took it down to his cave one afternoon. I wasn't at all prepared for the effect that this childish daub had upon him. It was really a most painful quarter of an hour. He seized the thing out of my hands and stared at it with his eyes growing big. Then—I'm damned if it isn't wicked to talk of it—he gave an awful cry, *Marjorie!* and broke into incoherent weeping.

"I did my best, of course, to cheer him up; and tried to make him come back with me to the house; but he refused. After dinner I went down to see him again, and spent a long evening with him in his cave, which he has made quite habitable. He tried to explain himself and his behavior—for the

first time in his life—and the result was that the ice was broken pretty completely. He told me far more about himself than any ordinary man would have done. Nobody, of course, is ever quite so confidential as a recluse. But there was a kind of practical reason, too, for his telling me, as the present owner of Foley's house; and, indeed, even for my warning you about it, if you're going to be here as often as I hope. Ignorance might defeat his purpose in certain circumstances.

"He remembered the painting of the picture. It was done after their last day at the cave. On that last afternoon, though the others didn't know it, Marjorie had promised to marry him.

" 'It was here,' he said, 'by the driftwood fire, that she gave me her promise.'

"That very night a telegram came to the house saying that her father was seriously ill, and asking her to take the first train back to London. She did so; and she has never been heard of again."

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed, at the abrupt simplicity of Ashton's last sentence.

"Why, perhaps one has to be a recluse in order to appreciate the importance of the individual case. In the London newspapers, of course, one reads of thousands of people who disappear and cannot be traced. She was merely one of them.

"The telegram was a fraud. Her father was perfectly well. He had gone away for a fortnight's holiday at Eastbourne about the hour when the telegram was dispatched. Only an elderly caretaker had been left at the house. Marjorie was seen on the arrival platform at Euston by the wife of the

vicar of this parish, who happened to have gone to London by the same train, and had talked to her during the journey. The vicar's wife was a dear, fussy old lady, and she said—afterwards—that she had felt vaguely uneasy about the 'child,' as she called her. But she was reassured when Marjorie told her that she saw Masters (the doctor's coachman) waiting for her with the brougham. She actually saw Marjorie and her parcels being helped into the brougham by a woman dressed as a hospital nurse, and she thought that the doctor must be more seriously ill than she had supposed.

"Now, Masters had been discharged two days previously for drunkenness; but it came out at the inquiry that it would have been only too easy for him to get possession of the brougham on that day, without anyone ever knowing about it. The caretaker's evidence was perfectly straightforward, and proved that Marjorie had never arrived at the house. It also came out that Masters knew about the emerald star. From her conversation with her father at leave-taking, Masters knew that when he drove her to the station for her northward journey she was carrying it in a little bag, inside her blouse. But they couldn't find him. There was practically no clew to his whereabouts; and it was more than a fortnight before Marjorie was missed, for the family were all bad correspondents."

"Had the police any theory?"

"Yes. Robbery and murder, complicated by revenge. But Masters had an unpleasant record, and they soon dropped the murder theory for something worse. They thought they knew the hospital

nurse. The emerald star was actually traced to Brussels; and, though there was no absolute proof of it, the police believed that they had traced both the hospital nurse and Marjorie from Brussels to Lisbon, and, eventually, to Rio de Janeiro. There they lost them.

"In the meantime, her father did really fall ill, and the awful suspense killed him. It was only through Gregory's almost superhuman efforts that the police picked up the trail at all. He hadn't much money—only about three hundred pounds a year; but he worked his way out to South America, and visited all the hell's kitchens that he could find. It was fruitless; and, at the end of two years he came back, with gray hair. He's a very strong man, physically, or I think it would have broken him altogether.

"He seemed to shrink from all human intercourse, and I think one can understand it. Soon after his return he came up here, on a sort of walking tour, simply to see the only place that he associated with Marjorie, and his only link with her. He found the house empty. The Foleys had gone abroad and the farm had been sold to a stranger.

"He wandered along the coast to the cave, and spent the night there in his sleeping-sack. He slept soundly for the first time in two years; and he stayed on.

"This was nearly a quarter of a century ago. He has been there ever since. All that he needs in the way of supplies he gets from the farm. He gets newspapers and a few books by post, and occasional letters from relatives. They are addressed

to my care now; and I often make them the excuse for going to see him. Some books and a letter arrived this evening. That will be our excuse for going to see him to-morrow. I don't believe he could be induced to fetch them himself, or to walk more than half a mile away from his cave. He hardly likes to lose sight of the entrance. You guess why? Yes. He believes that, if Marjorie lives and is able to secure her freedom, she will never willingly communicate with him again, or with anyone that she knew in her former life; but that, one day, sooner or later, she may come and look at the place where she and her lover were promised to one another. At any rate, it's the only chance. He may have some particular lover's reason for thinking the chance a better one than you or I would; but, in any case, the Wreckers' Cave is the only place that there is a definite possibility of her visiting—so far as he knows; and, if she visits it at any hour of the day or night, during his lifetime, he means to be there to meet her. He has taken every other precaution that he could think of. It's hardly likely that she will trouble the strangers who now occupy the doctor's house; but they will warn him if she does; and there are many agencies in London and other parts of the world, several even in the underworld, that will receive the biggest reward he could offer if they discover her. But this one definite point of contact he means to watch personally.

"It may be madness from the world's point of view; yet, upon my soul, when one has watched so-called men of the world killing themselves for wealth

or place, or the pampering of their bellies, one might well hesitate to call a man mad who dared to live for something better. When you see him to-morrow I think you'll agree that there may be something very wrong indeed with our world, but there's nothing wrong with the Troglodyte."

On the next afternoon Ashton put the parcel of books into a fish-basket, with a tin of the Troglodyte's favorite tobacco, and a few other oddments, and we set off, through the garden, picking raspberries from the bushes as we went. It was a glorious walk along the coast—first through unfenced wheat fields, then between gorse-bushes on a green hillside, that sloped with innumerable rabbit-burrows right down to the beach; and then along the shore itself under tall black cliffs where the crying of the kittiwakes deepened the loneliness. It was, indeed, as deserted a coast as you could find in the world. We walked for an hour over long shelves of rock, skirting the diamond-clear rock-pools, where the sea-anemones opened their flower-like disks of orange and purple, and little green crabs went scuttling to and fro under the brown fringes of seaweed.

"Listen," said Ashton, once, motioning me to stand still; and, as the echoes of our footsteps ceased to leap back from the cliffs, we heard in a breathless calm, between the long whispers of the tide against the reef, a faint trickling sound where a few pebbles had been dislodged on the hillside above by a rabbit or a bird. The silence was so deep that—if the paradox be allowable—it crept with minute sounds. One imagined that one heard

the grass growing on the cliff-top, and the drying of the seaweed in the sun.

"Now you understand what I meant by 'loneliness,'" said Ashton.

"*Loneliness*," echoed the cliffs.

"And peace," he said.

"*Peace*," whispered the cliffs.

Both of us laughed and resumed our walk. The echoes doubled our laughter, blending it uncannily with the doubled witch's cackling of a big black cormorant, that flew with neck outstretched along the reef, as if to warn the Troglodyte of our invasion.

It was harder walking now, for the shore was broken up into massive bowlders covered with slippery kelp, and we had to leap from rock to rock, trying to choose those where the rough clusters of peak-shelled limpets afforded a foothold. After a quarter of a mile of this a milder and more sustained clamor of sea-birds reached us. We halted and looked up, for our eyes had been busy with our rough road.

"There's the Troglodyte," said Ashton, pointing to the edge of the reef, where a wheeling cloud of white gulls mewed and laughed, and browned the bright air like a flight of snowflakes. I saw a red-billed sheldrake swooping down from the cliffs to join them, and, in the center of their tumult a dark figure, motionless as the rock on which he stood.

"It's not entirely disinterested affection on the part of our little sisters, the sea-birds," I said, after a look through my field-glasses. "He's cleaning his fish."

We moved towards him till we could see the big

white herring-gulls pouncing like winged cats on the red and silver morsels that Gregory tossed to them. Sometimes they would catch flying fragments in the air and worry them as a terrier worries a rat. Sometimes they would snatch pieces out of the water as they sank, and fight for them; or a big bully of a gannet would give chase to a sand-piper, trying to swallow its booty as it flew.

"Horribly like politicians, aren't they?" muttered Ashton. "Wait here for a moment while I go and talk to him."

I sat down on a sun-baked rock, lit my pipe, and tried to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, while Ashton went ahead with the creel. The cave-dweller seemed very glad to see him. Even at a distance, one could feel his pleasant greeting. He was evidently delighted with the contents of the basket. He rinsed his hands in a pool, dried them on a cloth, and pulled the wrapper off the books with all the eagerness of a bibliophile.

Ashton made a diplomatic move to come away; but Gregory stopped him at once. His voice reached me clearly on the sea-wind—a very deep musical voice. Don't go yet, Ashton. Come and join me in my evening meal."

I couldn't hear Ashton's reply, but I gathered that he was explaining my existence and that the explanation was satisfactory. Probably it was to the effect that I was a harmless idiot of an artist and, therefore, a fellow castaway. At any rate, Gregory came striding forward, a tall lean figure in old blue dungarees, bleached by salt and sun.

"Oh, but persuade him to come, too," he said, with all the grace of the perfect host.

His appearance on a nearer view impressed one with his vitality. There was an athletic ease and freedom about every movement of his body. The heavy mane of gray hair was carried off well by his height, but it thinned his clean-shaven face, burnt to an Indian red by the sun, and gave it more of the ascetic than was really its own. Strangely enough, it was a pleasure-loving face. There was power and gentleness, and a strong will behind it; but it was not the face of a man who could easily resign the material world or the life of the senses. Only the eyes, deep-set, glowing with thought, and quick with humor, gave you the complete man. There was a perpetual shadow of sadness in their sockets that could no more be banished by laughter than you could abolish the night by lighting the windows of your house. They were the eyes of a lonely man who had looked through great distances of space and time, and caught glimpses of something more permanent beyond.

Without further parley, he led us to the mouth of his cave, a jagged black hole in the face of the cliff.

"My house doesn't wear its heart upon its sleeve," he said, as he went ahead of us into the dark tunnel, where the deepening of his voice and the chilling of the air gave me a curious sense of symbolical meanings in our passage from the outer to the inner world.

He flashed an electric torch before our feet now, for the last glimmer of daylight had vanished.

"I don't hang a lamp in my entrance hall," he said. "It's visited by the sea too often. But there are organ pipes over your head." He threw the light towards the furrowed roof. "At high tide, in stormy weather, the sea plays me the most glorious music here. My quarters are a little farther along."

For at least fifty yards farther we followed his torch through the narrowing shaft in the rock. Then it turned and went off to the left for, perhaps, another twenty-five yards; and I thought I saw a glimpse of daylight again. Another sharp turn brought us to our destination. A heavy sailcloth was stretched across the cave, with a door in it arranged like that of a tent.

"Come in, and make yourselves comfortable," said Gregory, holding back the flap; and, as we entered, he extinguished his torch. It was no longer needed. The evening light streamed through a natural porthole, a yard and a half wide, in the rock wall.

I stared about me in amazement. The room, as it must be called, was lofty and spacious—about twenty-four feet in diameter, and hexagonal in shape.

The facet of the wall opposite the window was lined with books in a massive bookcase of teak. The sunset-light played over some beautiful leather bindings. Facing the door by which we had entered there was another door of the same kind, in a curtain of sailcloth. Gregory explained that it shut off a continuation of the cavern.

Between this door and the window there was a

massive ship's stove, with a basket of logs beside it. The chimney had been fitted closely into a crevice above the window. Above the stove was a shelf on which a few photographs were arranged on either side of a pewter pot, the relic of a college boat-race. One of the photographs, I saw at once, was of Marjorie Foley. In front of the stove, as far as the table, the floor was covered with straw matting and a warm rug. "I'm rather a follower of the Golden Dustman, you observe," said Gregory. But the house of the Troglodyte was not at all on its defense. It was almost supercilious in its independence.

I looked at one of the books, a delightful edition of—oddly enough—"Emaux et Camées!" with *aquarelles* by Henri Caruchet. It opened at "Le Château du Souvenir." I felt as if I had stumbled upon a page of somebody's private diary; and I put Gautier back on his shelf, with a somewhat inane comment on the good condition of the books.

"If you look out of the window," said Gregory as he knelt in front of the stove and set the fire blazing, "you'll see that we're fairly high up the cliff, looking southwest, from the side of a promontory. It's a sheer drop of fifty feet to the beach. The entrance is very deceptive—a steady ascent all the way. We're practically at the top of the promontory. There are only about three yards of solid rock between us and the sky. That's why it's never damp in here. The rains are shed off, and there's nothing to filter through. I can get fresh water, though, by going through my back door about three hundred yards into the cave. It's on

of those tunnels that are said to run for miles. There's a legend about its going all the way to the ruins of the old monastery, four miles inland. I've never been farther than the spring; but there are times when, sitting here alone, I hear footsteps—oh, the faintest ghostly footsteps—approaching from the other end."

He stopped and listened. A cold shiver went through me as I pictured him, in that eerie solitude, on a winter's night, drowsing by the stove, perhaps, till a few pebbles, dropping in the dark cavern beyond startled his dreaming mind—for one intolerable moment—into a dreadful and fantastic hope.

"This might be a room in one of the lost towers of Tintagel," said Ashton. "It's difficult to realize that it's accidental."

"Accidental?" said Gregory, with an emphasis which I noted, because I was on the lookout for peculiarities of temperament. "Is anything accidental? Perhaps it's one of those things like the formation of crystals, where Nature works by laws that we don't understand, and gives you the effect of conscious art. Perhaps—ah, well, I'm sure she meant this for my table."

He pointed to the table, also hexagonal, in the middle of the room; and I recognized the flat rock of the picture. It had a neatly fitted top now of polished teak.

"Of course, I did the carpentering myself," said Gregory, "but the sea gave me the wood. I always imagine that there's a peculiar beauty about wreckage. I suppose it's an extension of the old romantic fallacies about ruins and lost souls. But I'm really

sure that a driftwood fire has magic in it. The sea has given it all kinds of strange colors. It's a wonderful flame to dream by, on a Christmas night, when the winds go roaring over the roof, and the flood-tide is beating at your door. All the timber in the place has been broken out of ships by the sea. These things, for instance." He indicated the two snug elbow chairs in which we were sitting then. "And the bookcase. All the timber was left at my door. It only wanted assembling.

"I've a theory," he continued, as he made his remarkably neat and skillful culinary arrangements, "that, if you wait long enough, the sea (by which I mean, perhaps, the universal tide of things) will bring you all you want. Of course"—he laughed whimsically, for he was talking somewhat at random with his eyes on a sizzling sea-perch—"the fleshy part of you may be dust and ashes before it arrives. But hasn't it struck you as rather a curious corollary to the evolution business that, if an immortal being from any other planet could have been dumped down on this earth before we had developed anything higher than a jelly-fish, he would only have to sit down and wait in the right place—so to speak—and sooner or later 'a newsboy would approach him and offer him his choice between the Liberal and Conservative press of modern London? None of us really believe that, if you filled a sack with the letters of the alphabet, you could shake out the text of *Hamlet* after any number of trials; but, until recently, modern science had come to believe that kind of thing, unconsciously, on a large scale, where the protests of the intellect were

confounded by the multiplicity of things. I wish that one of those materialistic gentlemen could have been endowed with life for a few æons, dumped down here, and told beforehand that he had only to wait and trust the jelly-fish. He would no more have believed in the advent of London than the men of to-day believe in the life of the world to come."

His voice dropped in the last few words from the light note of the jester to something like emotion. It was only a momentary deepening of the tone, but it stirred me curiously. I wondered whether the quotation in the last phrase was significant, and I believed that it was. It was like an incomplete *motif* in music, but it hinted at the depths of his character. Ashton was right about this man's complete freedom from eccentricity. He was rooted in the center of things. Under his almost deliberately worldly manner, I thought I had detected a note of mysticism, measured and profound, like the sound of the incoming tide on the rocks below.

But it did not in the least interfere with his efficiency in practical matters. In a very few minutes Gregory had spread as appetizing a supper on the table as any hungry materialist could desire. The sea-perch, with a few thin rashers of bacon and fried potatoes, were delicious. The coffee had a fragrance that, perhaps, only the camp-fire can give it. We had a second course of roasted apples and cream, followed by some excellent cheese; and, when we had arranged ourselves round the stove and lighted our pipes, I felt that there was much to be said for life in a cave.

It was growing dark now, so Gregory lighted a reading-lamp with a green shade, which he placed in the center of the table. Through the porthole one could see the evening star, like a sparkle of dew, in a rosy space of sky. Two or three sea-gulls drifted like petals over a sea that the sunset had smoothed with a delicate film of oily color.

"It's time to close the shutter," said Gregory. "It strikes a little cold in here after sundown. Do you mind not speaking for a moment or two? I've a somewhat shy friend waiting outside."

He went to the window and gave a low whistle. Almost immediately there was a flutter of wings in the opening, darkening the west, and giving one a sense of snowflakes against its rich colors. Then a large sea-bird alighted on the ledge within. I knew, without being told, that this must be the sheldrake which I had seen swooping from the cliffs a little earlier. It moved, craning its iridescent green head at us a little, to its accustomed corner, shook out the white, black and chestnut patchwork of its beautiful wings, and opened its brilliant red bill for the good-night morsel in Gregory's hand.

"There," said Gregory soothingly. "*You* don't mind visitors, do you, Shelley? *You're* not a silly old recluse, are you? Not a bit of it. That's right, Shelley." And, stroking the bird's head with one hand he closed the wooden shutter against the window with the other and fastened it.

Several times after this, Ashton and I spent an evening with the Troglodyte. Now that the ice was broken, he treated me as if he had known me all his life.

"That's because you're an artist," Ashton commented. "You belong to a species that he understands. At any rate, he credits you with the virtues of all the rest of the breed."

There may have been something in this, for Gregory made me promise to come down and listen to his "cave-music," as he called it, during the next storm; and so, one blustery night, I found myself floundering down to Wreckers' Cave, alone, an hour or two before high tide. Ashton was detained at the house by some business correspondence.

I was a little late, for the tide would soon make it impossible to reach the cave, and I was delayed by one of those depressing incidents, common enough in some parts of England, but rare on that lonely coast. The full moon, scudding through wild clouds, threw fantastic shadows over the wheat fields as I took the narrow path to the coast, and I had overtaken the dark shape that hobbled ahead of me before I realized that it was flesh and blood. It was a bedraggled elderly woman, of the vagrant type, rubbing the ears of wheat between her hands, and munching the grain with pitiful eagerness.

I gave her "good night" and passed; but the storm looked so threatening that I stopped and went back to ask her where she thought of getting shelter, for there was none on that road.

"I'm all right, thank you," she said, in the dreadful hoarse voice of the human derelict. "I know these parts pretty well. Does Mr. Foley still live here, or his son, can you tell me?"

"Foley?" I cried in astonishment. "Mr. Foley sold his house twenty-five years ago."

"Ah," said the woman. "That's a long time, isn't it?"

"Did you know Mr. Foley?" I said.

She turned her face blindly towards me. It looked swollen and gin-sodden, for one could hardly suppose that she was given to tears.

"Twenty-five years ago," she said.

"Have you come far?"

"London."

I looked at her battered boots.

"Where are you going to get shelter to-night?" I went on. "There's nothing in this direction, and it's going to be stormy."

"Oh, I don't worry about that. There's a place—not so far from here—where I can lodge. At the sign of the Beautiful Star, of course!" She laughed harshly.

"Look here," I said, "you'd better come back to the house with me. I'll find out what can be done for you there."

"There's nothing to be done for me, thank you," she said. "I've come up here for a . . . holiday, and I'm camping out for choice. I've got my lodging, and I've got my bedroom candle—see?" She rummaged in the bundle she was carrying and produced a candle and a box of matches.

She spoke with an independence that ended the matter, and turned away abruptly on a path that went inland; but, even when I had reached the shore, the thought of her forlorn condition seemed to deepen the indifferent roar of the sea and add a wintry sting to the wind.

It was, indeed, a wild night. The breakers came

bellowing over the reef like shaggy herds of white buffaloes; and I fought my way against the wind with difficulty.

Gregory was standing at the mouth of the cave when I reached it.

"You've chosen a good night," he said, "but if you'd tried to get here ten minutes later you couldn't have done it. The tide will be all round the promontory by that time. You realize, of course, that there'll be no way out of this till one o'clock in the morning."

The next wave confirmed his words by driving us hurriedly into the cave. I told him that I didn't grudge a few hours of the night to the kind of symphony he had promised me; and, in fact—though I didn't tell him this—he interested me so enormously that I welcomed the opportunity of knowing him better, whether the music were forthcoming or not.

As I lit my pipe by his stove to-night I felt that I was regaining something that had almost vanished since my undergraduate days, when one used to debate all the atheisms and religions through a cloud of tobacco smoke and within hearing of the chapel organ. Perhaps in natural reaction from his usual conditions, Gregory talked with great animation. It is difficult to suggest the kindling effect that his words had upon my imagination, for the presence of the man and the surroundings contributed so much to it. But I thought that I had never listened to any conversation so entertaining and—at the same time—so profound. He talked of literature—the poetry of Villon, and the "Diary of an Im-

pressionist," by Lafcadio Hearn. Then we drifted into a discussion of human immortality.

I shall not attempt to reproduce the extemporaneous music of his reasoning; but the mind of this man was an exquisite miracle to me. He climbed to unimaginable heights as easily and grandly as an eagle, looked full upon the sun of truth, and then dropped to earth again and delivered his report. Sentence followed lucid sentence, each packed with thought enough to fill a volume and make the reputation of many a modern philosopher.

A single instance of this, though it fails to convey the sweep of his thought, still recurs to me, perhaps because it answered a difficulty of my own. I had asked him why human life should be definitely marked for immortality, if all other forms were to perish. And he replied in a single sentence, with a combined picture of the evolution of modern being from the embryo and the evolution of modern civilization from the amœba: "If there be any truth in that," he said, "how ridiculous it is to talk of anything 'perishing.' How can we set limits to the possibilities of bird, or flower or bee, or the lowest and most repulsive forms of life when they pass out of our ken? If the jelly-fish can be responsible for London, I'm not going to discount the infinite future of Shelley—there." He pointed to the sea-bird on the window ledge. Then in another sentence, which I dare not reproduce apart from the glow of his own personality, he set the whole universe vibrating with immortal life; and I realized that he had brooded over the whole problem for himself on a scale that would daunt al-

most anyone but the initiates of the East, and that, at the same time, he had worked it all out as logically as a Huxley.

"The music will soon begin now," he said at last. "I'll make some coffee in the meantime."

A moment later he made an exclamation of annoyance. There was not enough fresh water, and he would have to go to the spring, in the continuation of the cave, to fetch some.

"Don't try to follow me out of curiosity," he said. "There are several branches farther along, and if you took the wrong one I don't know where it might lead you. Here's something to read—it may amuse you—a sort of program I tried to write for the storm symphony. I'm afraid I shall miss part of the first movement."

He laid a manuscript on the arm of my chair, and went through the inner door to the cavern, carrying a can for the water.

I picked up the manuscript and began to read. Already, at the cave-mouth down below, there were deep murmurings that made a fitting accompaniment. The manuscript told (in words that can never be reproduced) of the thoughts that passed on a winter's night through the mind of the cave-dweller as he sat alone by his fire and listened. Here and there I detected the note of the mystic again; and, hidden beneath it all, in a musical undertone, rather than in the words themselves, there was the constant thought of his tragic loss.

Bits of sentences and the general drift of it I still remember. "*It begins with a rustling murmur,*" he wrote, "*like the music in a little shell from the*

South Seas that I used to carry to church when I was a small boy; so that, under the high pew, I could listen to the whisper of the lagoon during the litany; or the greencrested humming-birds droning round a white cockatoo with a crimson hood during the Athanasian creed; or the trade-wind singing through the cocoanut palms during the sermon."

Then he described the gradual deepening of the music till the breakers marched in a great dim procession; and he saw the awful panoplies of forgotten empires moving from darkness to darkness through the brief splendor of shattering trumpets and blazing banners when they culminated and broke. He saw the barbarous pageants of Asia rolling out of the East. He heard the soft earth-shaking tread of the troops of elephants, cloaked with cloth of gold. The ivory towers upon their backs were stained with crimson; for in every tower the severed head of an enemy was borne, like a gorgeous jewel, in triumph to the Maharajah. The elephants rolled like ships between the shining temple-domes, and an army in turbans of white silk moved with them. The dusky hosts all shouted together for victory, and the elephants lifted their trunks and trumpeted for joy. Yet, in a moment, the wind of death descended upon them. Their broken colors flashed like the foam-bows on the on-setting crests of the wave, and like the blind innumerable drops of spray they were whirled into the darkness.

Egypt, Greece, Rome, each in its own majesty moved to its moment of glory, and broke with the

breaking wave. *Pollice verso!* The amphitheater yelled. The white body of the gladiator was dragged with hooks across the blood-stained sand. The lions roared and ramped in their cages as they saw the women and children, their destined prey, driven before the throne of Heliogabalus and pleading for mercy. The doors opened with a sound of thunder, and again the merciful darkness covered them.

Then, out of that darkness, he heard a terrible cry arising; as if all the grotesque forgotten dead on all the battlefields of the world were sweeping forward under a storm of tattered flags: all those young men who died for Alexander of Macedon, and all those who died for Cæsar, and all those who died for Napoleon Bonaparte, and all those who died in Flanders yesterday. All around them the night-wind was one long wail of women and children. And these, too, lifted up their hands to the indifferent stars and made their prayer, and were swept back like foam into the darkness.

I laid the manuscript down for a moment and looked about me. I was tasting the true loneliness of this place now. Rain and hail were volleying against the wooden shutter. The sea was pounding at the cliffs below, and one could imagine this little cavern in the rock to be the only human dwelling-place left in the universe. The contrast of its quietude, in the subdued light of the green-shaded lamp, with the tumult outside, had a strange effect upon me. It was too extreme a contrast, and I began to feel that the place was waiting—waiting for something to happen; and the waiting had an

intense quality about it that worked upon my nerves as a burning glass works upon the skin. A man's whole life was concentrated in this one spot, and one almost felt it physically. I started at the clicking of an ember in the stove. Then I went to the inner door and peered through the flap into the dark tunnel, listening for Gregory's return. It sounds absurd, but, for the first time since I was a child, I felt the strange fear that children feel of loneliness in the dark. I remembered the strange remark he had made to me about the footsteps—and I, too, imagined them, footsteps not his own. The loneliness grew upon me to such a degree that I was on the point of calling into the darkness to find out if he could hear me. But for some queer reason—I have never been able to account for it—I was afraid to do so. As for following him, his warning was quite unnecessary.

I turned back to the room, and the awful contrast seized me again. The place seemed to have a will and a purpose of its own that gripped one with an almost hypnotic power. Deep thunders rumbled up from the cave-mouth. I picked up the manuscript again and continued reading it.

It told how, as the unseen hand of the storm moved over the stops of that wild organ, an awful *vox humana* rose, the voice

“Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore
Within the walls of cities.”

It was the voice of those martyred priestesses of our civilization, who are sacrificed for our trans-

gressions by thousands and tens of thousands, on the reeking altars of every great city in the world. It told how the dreamer in his cavern heard the roar of the traffic over streets that were cobbled with the living breasts of those cast-aways, our sisters, and how he saw their dead hands weaving the shroud of nations. Then (for the pictures formed and dissolved like clouds) all their agonies were embodied in the despair of one woman. The waves tossed and flashed and swirled around her. She clung with writhing hands to the slippery sides of a rough black rock. The next savage gray rush of the water would overwhelm her and drag her down. She cried for help; and, in answer, the sky struck at her with lightning, and the darkness blotted her out for ever.

Then, out of the night of that agony, arose those awful voices of hope, more terrible than despair because they are unconquerable, the voices of those mad, blind men, the prophets: *They shall not hunger nor thirst any more; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*

"What does it mean," he cried, "this eternal Calvary of hope, this eternal division between our powers and our desires, our bodies and our souls, our deeds and our dreams? *They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*"

The earth? The music of that tempestuous surge told of things that were older than the earth, disastrous changes in depths of space, where a million suns are only a little haze of silver dust, a feather

of light that moves a million miles a day, yet seems to hang motionless in a night that is immeasurable. It told of little wisps and wreaths of nebulous fire, a myriad little solar systems, each greater than our own, forming and dissolving for ever and for ever through inconceivable distances, rushing from darkness to darkness, freighted with innumerable little souls, fathers and mothers and children, lovers and friends, hoping, despairing, praying—to a boundless mockery, unless the words of the mad, blind men were true.

And then, at last, as the storm died down, and the tide turned, the music of the great deep that underlies every storm and all disaster, and is at one with the calm rhythm of the whole creation, confirmed the words of the prophets by the majesty of its own law, and breathed its own sabbath upon the mind of the dreamer. *"For the voices of the storm,"* he wrote, *"are only voices of the moment; but the voice of the sea is the voice of the Eternal, saying from the innermost heart of the universe, 'Yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee.'"*

I laid the manuscript down again; and at this very moment a sound reached me that stopped the blood in my veins. I heard footsteps echoing faintly in the inner tunnel; and I knew with the strangest certainty that they were not Gregory's footsteps. I went to the inner door again and peered into the darkness. The faint sound drew nearer and grew louder—a dragging shuffle quite unlike the resonant stride of the cave-dweller. In a few seconds I saw a glimmer of light approaching; and then, to my

amazement, a woman, holding a lighted candle over her head, approached round a corner of the rock, and groped like a sleep-walker towards me. It was the woman I had passed in the wheat fields. She stumbled like a bewildered creature into the lamp-light.

"Ah," she said, "it's you. I didn't expect to see a fire—and books. Do you live here?"

For a moment I could not answer her. She stood there, drenched from head to foot, in tattered, sopping boots, a most dreadful piece of human wreckage; and, in her very humility, an awful accusation against the world. I didn't dare to formulate the thought in my mind.

"How did you find your way here?" I said at last.

"Don't you know the other way into the cave?" she said. "I know these parts pretty well. This is where I meant to sleep; but it was high tide, so I came the other way round. I didn't know anyone lived here. I suppose I'll have to go."

She stopped and stared round her, like a woman in a trance, drinking everything in with her eyes. Then I saw the tears glistening on her face which, puffy and sodden though it was, either with gin or the beating of the rain, or else—God knows—from maudlin weeping out there in the night, still retained some traces of beauty.

"Come to the fire," I said. "You must be soaked to the skin."

She shivered and clasped her ragged shawl around her, as if she were waking from a dream.

"No," she said, "I'm used to it. I'll go now. I didn't know there was anyone here."

"It's impossible for you to go yet," I said. "The storm is getting worse every minute. The fire and a cup of coffee will do you no harm."

She shuffled up to the chair that I placed for her by the stove, and peered at the drowsing sea-bird on the window ledge.

"Ah," she said, turning to me with moist, dark eyes. "He's sheltering here, too. You must be a very kind man."

"I'm only a visitor here, like yourself," I replied; and as I spoke she did what I had been waiting for, in order to make certain. She drew nearer to the stove, and raised her eyes to the shelf of photographs above it.

In an instant the picture of Marjorie Foley was in her hand.

"Who lives here?" she cried, clutching my sleeve.

There was no need for me to answer, for I heard Gregory's footsteps; and the next moment he stood looking at us from the doorway.

She faced him, swaying a little on her feet, with a faint smile, exactly like that of a dogged but hopelessly beaten pugilist standing up to the final blow. It was terrible to see that unflinching despair.

"I didn't expect to see you here," she said quietly. "I came here to die."

"Marjorie," he whispered, stealing towards her as if he were afraid of frightening her.

She looked at him, silently, still swaying, still smiling that faint, dreadful smile.

Fifty yards away the flood-tide surged into the cave with the first great burst of sea-music.

"Marjorie," he whispered again; and like a breaking wave, she moved towards him. I saw his arms go round her.

Then I turned away and hid my face in my hands.

II

CHECKMATE

I

“A wicked act,
What is it but a false move in the game,
A blind man’s blunder, a deaf man’s reply?”
Tales of the Mermaid Tavern.

WHEN Everard Martin was left alone after dinner—a most excellent little dinner—he drank a thimbleful of Benedictine and lit a cigarette. He had put out two of the candles that had been burning badly, and the soft shaded light of the other two made him look rather younger than he was. His black velvet smoking-jacket, hardly distinguishable from the paneling behind him, made his face and hands emerge from the dark like those of a living Raeburn portrait. His rosy, clean-shaven, clear-cut face, with the curved beak and prominent chin, floating there among the faint blue wreaths of tobacco smoke, suggested the successful barrister rather than the novelist or playwright. But a close observer would have noted the stigmata of his profession (one might almost say, as of all the civilized moderns, the symptoms of his case) in the super-sensitive quickness of his nerves. It is a commonplace to say that civilized men have lost the alertness of the tiger or the Red Indian; but they have

acquired a new quickness of the senses to a host of impressions of which the tiger and the Red Indian would be utterly unaware. And Everard Martin was far more keenly aware than the average human being. This was, of course, the secret of his work, the explanation of its quality.

It was noticeable in the strong nervousness of the hands, a quickness and grace of movement that did not for a moment convey the idea of restlessness or fidgetiness, but rather the delicacy of a finely adjusted, powerful machine, very steadily, tensely, controlled.

The door opened. Helen, his wife, and Pauline, his daughter, in evening clothes and furs, appeared, waving good-by to him. They stood there, framed in the brighter light of the hall—like a picture, touched with more significance than he knew.

Helen, one of those fragile Dresden-china women who never grow old, and seem only to gather a little more wistfulness in their faces with the passage of time, looked younger than Pauline to-night. Pauline had inherited her father's height, and something of his quick nervous temperament. This was evident enough in the sensitive red mouth, as it quivered into a smile; and in the deep eyes, that seemed always to be looking into a far country, a more constant world than ours.

"You won't change your mind, Popples, and come with us?" called Pauline. "There are five seats in the box, you know."

"Five? Who is to make the fifth of this party?"

"Maurice is to meet us there."

"Oh, Maurice is to be there, is he?"

"You don't look altogether pleased about it. Why, Daddie, what is the matter?"

Pauline ran up to her father, placed two slender white hands on his shoulders and looked into his face. For a moment she had imagined that his usually ruddy face had lost its color.

"I'm a little absent-minded to-night," he said, "thinking about my work, I suppose."

"But you looked so desperately sad when I mentioned Maurice. You want me to be happy, don't you, Daddie?"

"More than anything in the world, dear. But tell me"—he took both of her hands—"are you so absolutely sure that your happiness means—Maurice?"

"But, Daddie, what an extraordinary question to ask me just as we are rushing off to the opera. Should I be engaged to him if I don't think so?"

His troubled gray eyes met the large dark sincerity of her own and fell.

"Nowadays," he muttered, "life is such a rush for you young people that one feels you can have very little time to make up your minds. Why, I don't suppose you even know the color of his eyes."

"Gray, Daddie. Very like the color of yours. Oh, yes. I know what you are thinking. An American girl told me this afternoon that she had been engaged sixteen times in five years, and didn't write to break off the fifteenth engagement until she had been married for six weeks. She had clothes enough to fill three rooms in this house, and she told me that she was looking for a 'dear little cottage' in the country. You are always telling me that I

am a child of the age, but you must admit that I am fairly consistent. I don't do things of that sort, even if I laugh at them. But I suppose you have been saying all these things to test me. It's rather too bad, Daddie. If I hadn't seen through you it might have spoilt the evening. And we're late already. Won't you come with us?"

"No. I'm going to do some work."

"The mystery book?"

"Yes. The mystery book. The *chef d'œuvre*."

"Ah, well. Good luck to it."

She threw him a kiss, and the door closed upon her young beauty with the effect of a bright light going out, leaving Martin in the discreet and mellow dusk of the orange-shaded candles, to his own meditations.

There was every reason why these should be very pleasant. He was a very fortunate man. He was not yet forty-five; and, after a very brief struggle with the common adversities of the penniless young literary man, he had taken his place as one of the "names" that counted. His novels were read as widely as good writing could hope to be read; and, despite the "high-brow" and the prig, this did not mean that they were restricted to a small literary public.

Everard Martin's work, in fact, was in the major key and he had found the right way to the major audience. His plays held the stage in two continents and, best of all, his reputation, even among the coteries, was that of an artist. He was not merely successful. He had done something that was

generally acknowledged to be worth doing, and yet he never seemed to be quite happy about it.

The external evidences of Martin's success were all around him. If ever they could afford him pleasure it must surely be now, when he was left, undisturbed, to enjoy a long and luxurious evening by his own fireside, to think over the difficulties he had surmounted, the many-bolted doors he had broken down, the literary battles he had fought and won; and to set a hundred memories a-swim in the blue wreaths of his own tobacco smoke.

When he had finished his cigarette, he rose, blew out the candles, and went to his book-lined study. This was his haven of quiet—amazingly still for any town house—where no sound but the ticking of the clock or the fluttering of the fire could ever intrude, unless by his own invitation. It was the pleasantest room in the house; and here, if anywhere, one might have expected the cloud to vanish from his brooding face.

If he had been asked to give any definite reason whatsoever for this "cloud" he could not have done so; but, for many months now, he had been obsessed by that strange feeling of expectancy, the vague presentiment of approaching disaster which is sometimes found in the early stages of some merely physical trouble. But Martin was unusually healthy and fit; and the shadow was not to be dismissed by exercise.

More and more, lately, on entering his study, he had a sense that the room itself seemed to be waiting for something to happen. At one time, he attributed this merely to its work-room hush, its air

of wanting him to sit at his desk and create. But, latterly, it had been more than this, and he could not explain it any more than he could explain why he had troubled Pauline with his doubts about Maurice. Maurice Lemoine was a very charming young artist who had already made a reputation for himself. He had lived most of his twenty-four and a half years in Paris, where his mother, the English widow of a Frenchman, still lived. But his work had captured the London critics. He was far more English than French, and he intended to make his headquarters in London. Out of mere perversity, apparently, Martin preferred to regard him as more French than English; and, though, in other matters, Martin had a cosmopolitan mind, he had developed a slight prejudice against what he vaguely called "international marriage" in the case of Pauline. This was probably nothing more than the usual moodiness of the male parent, deepened by the shadow of that other cloud which brooded over him so continually now.

For a moment or two, however, the cloud did disappear; while Martin stood, back to the fire, and looked at those warmly-colored rows of old books, the best friends he had ever had, or was ever likely to have.

He took down a volume at random from the shelf that was nearest to him, opened it at random, and read the passage that had been marked in pencil by the friend who sent him the book, in his undergraduate days. It was curious, very curious, that he should have hit upon that passage. It gave him that strange sense—it comes upon even the

most mechanically-minded of philosophers at times —of the presence in all our affairs of the Supreme Artist, the Creative Power that sustains the universe; touches our life with gleams of significant drama; and, if we have eyes to see, communicates with us constantly through each new combination of circumstances; so that all natural phenomena become symbolical hieroglyphics; and even light and darkness, the song of a bird, or the fresh buds on a tree at the door, have power to encourage, dissuade, or pierce with remorse. Every book, every picture, every human face, every forest and hill and meadow then is endowed with the magic quality that men once attributed to the verse of Virgil, when they opened his pages at random to look for guidance in their affairs.

How vividly that marked passage brought back the day when he had first read it, a day of terrible distress, on which those cool measured words had restored his self-control. It was a passage in one of Huxley's essays, a passage that had always haunted him; the famous comparison of life with a game of chess, played upon the chessboard of the world.

The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that his play is always fair, just and patient. But also we know, to our cost, that he never overlooks a mistake or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance. To the man who plays well the highest stakes are paid, with that sort of overflowing generosity with which the strong shows delight in strength. And one who plays ill is check-mated without haste, but without remorse.

He put the book back on the shelf; and, instead of going to his desk, where a neat pile of white paper awaited his pen, he decided to lose himself and his thoughts in his favorite recreation. He was reputed to be one of the most diligent and patient of contemporary writers; but those who affirmed it in press-paragraphs, and, in fact, even his immediate family, would have been astonished if they had known how spasmodic his writing had always been; how long the intervals when nothing was accomplished; and how often, when his study door was bolted to the world, he was sitting, not at his desk, but at the big shining chessboard with its beautiful pieces of black and white Chinese ivory.

A wonderful game, chess! The king of games! Magical, glamorous with the memory of thousands of years. He liked to think that, when Britain was still the lair of woad-streaked savages these old ivory pieces were subtly moved by the delicate long-pointed fingers of intellectual beings, almond-eyed thinkers and philosophers, under a cherry-tree in a palace-garden of old Cathay.

It was indeed always a pleasant moment when, with everyone else comfortably excluded, the curtains drawn, his old briar in his mouth, the whispering flames of the study-fire cheerfully reflected from the glass of the etchings and the warm leather-bindings of his books, Martin sat in front of that big chessboard. To him it was more than the game of kings. It was the game of Epicurean gods. The shining board was an image of the world. All the problems that confront one in life, political, artistic, ethical, could be considered there, with the

detachment of the immortals. It was the only game that could enthrall the solitary student with as potent a spell as though an opponent sat opposite to him in the flesh. For, on this board, by his own fire-side, he can play over the games of the masters. He can follow the fluctuations of their fortunes in their contests for world-primacy, as their moves are cabled from matches in distant countries. A few of those hieroglyphics in the *Times*, so meaningless to the uninitiated, enable him to follow at his ease, on his own board, every subtlety of the finest games of contemporary players all over the world. He can analyze their moves, and examine every detail, every implication of their tactics and strategy. His pieces move exactly as their pieces moved. It is not a mere reproduction, a picture, or a shadow of the original game; but the very game itself.

Moreover, he can follow there the rise and fall of the generations. He can watch the arrival of the new master and the desperate struggle of the older and more romantic players to maintain their pre-eminence against the new, colder, more scientific methods. It was an image life, even in this; and Martin never saw an older player going down before the ruthlessness of youth without something of the generous feeling which had marked him amongst the artists of his own profession as a "conservative" and "laudator temporis acti."

He was not this at all; but he was always saddened by that curious cruelty of the mob which rejoices in the downfall of those whom it has crowned. "There are dreadful things in human nature," he used to say, "and the suppressed smile at a friend's

disaster is growing a little too common in the modern world." So he was always, in playing over these games, a little tense with hope for the losing side; a little anxious that the age-worn master should at least come out of it with enough honor to justify the hero-worship with which he had been regarded. And, in all this, if one looks back at it in the light of what afterwards happened to himself, there is a suggestion for the psychologist that Martin's own subconscious mind was aware that the game of life was now setting against him.

And then, too, another thing that set the chess-player aloof with the immortals was the way in which he could play over the recorded games of the famous dead, exactly as they were played in life, recapturing every emotion, every excitement of the original players. He could take down from a bookshelf that volume of exquisite little masterpieces, the games of that Edgar Allan Poe of chess, that strange American master, Paul Morphy. Works of genius, poems, morbidly brilliant, those games, many of which Martin knew by heart, had advantage over other masterpieces for an artist who was a little tired of the world's way. They were conceived in symbols as remote as those of mathematics from the vexations of spirit that attend upon the art he practiced, and yet had all the historic glamour that kings and queens, bishops and knights and pawns have lent to the oldest and subtlest of games, making of it a gorgeous living fairy-tale.

And then, last, there were his own memories. He could open a battered old notebook and fight over again his own old battles—as far back as his under-

graduate days when he played for Cambridge University. Time was passing. The hieroglyphics in the notebook were already fading to that water lilac color which, till recently, he was wont to associate with the records of a much earlier generation. But, in playing over those games and re-tasting his victories and defeats, he re-captured the very faces of his young opponents; the color of the eyes, yes, the very color, even to the green specks in the gray; and, at certain moves, the expression of eagerness or annoyance; the nervous puffing of a pipe over a tense position; or—subdued as in life to the decorous hush of the chess club—a muttered “damn.”

More than once, alone there in the evening, he had raised his eyes after a move, expecting to see his old friend Drummond on the other side of the board. He was a good player, Drummond; but he had not seen him for twenty-five years.

He lit his pipe and prepared to play over, from memory, that great encounter between Anderssen and Kieseritzki, known as the “Immortal Game.” But he was not to play it that night.

He pushed out his white king’s pawn, two squares; and then turned to put a log on the fire. When he looked at the board again he saw, with a slight start of surprise, that he had apparently moved the black king’s pawn also; for that pawn, too, had been advanced two squares and confronted his own. Perhaps it was this that diverted him from his original intention; for, on his second move, he played out his king’s knight; and he had hardly set it down before he saw—that the black queen’s knight had also been advanced, to her bishop’s third. He had

certainly not moved it, and he had not seen it move.

He grew cold from head to foot. It was impossible of course. He must have overlooked that black knight. It could not have been on its proper square to begin with. The black pieces, at night, when there were shadows on the board, do sometimes trick the eye. It was a mere accident that in its present position it happened to give the usual reply to his own move. But his hand trembled a little, when he moved the white king's bishop out, and he watched the board intently this time.

How it happened he did not know. There was no visible movement. Unless it happened during the unconscious winking of his eye-lids nothing had moved. Unless a piece could disappear like a shadow from one square and reappear like a shadow on another, nothing had moved. But the black king's knight had now been advanced to his bishop's third; and this, too, was a logical reply to Martin's last move; one of those mathematically correct replies to the Ruy Lopez that practiced players make almost automatically.

For a minute or two he stared at the board as at an infernal machine, which it might be dangerous to touch. His mind was a whirl of bewildered ghosts of thought; the wraiths of his former philosophy. Fragments of familiar phrases echoed through his brain——*men of science——mechanism of the universe——the whole universe moving automatically——the mechanism of thought——laws of nature.—— But laws were not forces; only a statement that in our experience certain phenomena always follow certain other phenomena.—— The*

laws of nature explain nothing.—— They do not explain why the universe moves——the laws of the game do not explain why the game is being played at all. Fragments of verse, too, twisted and turned in the chaos of his mind, like little fiery nebulæ, trying to solidify into ordered worlds again:

“Do we move ourselves? Are we moved, by an unseen
hand, at a game
That pushes us off from the board, and others ever
succeed?”

And all around that little rhythmic nucleus whirled the chaotic fire-mist of other thoughts, trying to compose themselves into a cosmos, a comprehensible whole.

Universal nature moved by universal mind.—— The chessboard, a microcosm.—— Battleships moved by wireless. Could a mind, too, act on these material pieces from a distance? Material pieces? Composed of what? Atoms, electrons, centers of force, melting into “thin air.” No—into something far more real than all phenomena. Even the so-called materialists, Huxley himself, in the book which he had been reading earlier in the evening, affirmed that all the phenomena of nature are, in their ultimate analysis, known to us only as facts of consciousness. Those pieces were called “black,” and these “white,” but the sensations of blackness and whiteness were not external realities. They were formed in the brain, through the mechanism of certain nerves. The object in itself at the other end of the mechanism was something different,

something unknowable.—— The moving Power on the other side of the veil of phenomena, that mist of our own sensations in which we are imprisoned, none could know, unless, looking inward.

But who, or what was moving these pieces through the impenetrable veils of Space and Time? Was it all "*maya*,"—illusion?

The strangest fancies flashed upon him and vanished—Was he contending with some old almond-eyed owner of those pieces? Or was a dead college friend trying to communicate with him? Had there been some lesion in his brain? Had he himself been moving the pieces on both sides, without knowing it? Was he dreaming? Was he going mad?

His shaking hand went out again mechanically. He "castled" his king. A moment later he saw that the reply of black was made; and, strangely enough, it pulled him together. It was the reply of a practiced player who knew the latest analyses of the openings; and, by asserting the reign of reason to that extent, it gave him back his self-mastery. The bewildered panic of his nerves was succeeded by an abnormal calm and an intense intellectual curiosity, to which he rallied all the slumbering reserves of his spirit. He knew, instinctively, that this game was fraught with consequences of terrible importance to himself and those connected with him. He remembered what Huxley had said of the famous picture in which Retzsch depicted Satan playing at chess with man for his soul. He sat there, a modern counterpart of that man, and of Everyman. Modern, for his opponent was invisible; and perhaps he, too, might believe that instead of the

mocking fiend, his opponent was "a calm strong angel," who would rather lose than win. But always through his brain there was a warning echo. "*The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that his play is always fair, just and patient. But also we know, to our cost, that he never overlooks a mistake.*"

He sat there, fascinated, spell-bound. The game had become the only reality. It was the physical manifestation of his own relations with the universe. Everything else had become remote and unreal. The house was in a quiet street; and when a taxi-cab suddenly rattled past, it seemed a stranger sound to Martin than the witches' laughter of gulls among the remotest islands of the Hebrides. It seemed to come from an outside world with which he had little concern, and might soon cease to be concerned at all. He was ~~at~~ grips now with the inner realities; the imponderable things that move the world; the invisible, absolute, substantial powers to which sounds and colors and streets and taxi-cabs, and the distant glittering opera house, where his wife and daughter (but not Maurice) were at this moment listening to the Pilgrim's Chorus, were merely shadowy appearances, external and superficial phenomena, a painted mask. He had forgotten this external world altogether. He bent over the board and concentrated his whole mind and will on it as he had never concentrated them on anything in his life hitherto, while the embers clicked on the hearth, and the little clock on the mantelpiece ticked unconcernedly—*life, death; life, death; life, death*

II

At the end of an hour, the game appeared to be fairly even. Martin had been playing with the utmost caution; simplifying the position at every opportunity by exchanging pieces; avoiding all complications; and entering into no adventurous attacks. Their pieces were equal. He knew that, as in life, between scientific players of the game, success and even overwhelming victory can only come as the crowning result of an accumulation of small tactical advantages; and that these may, and often do, originate in one slight advantage in the position of a single pawn.

At the end of another half hour a single black pawn was "passed" into just such a slightly advantageous position. This, as usual, led to other very slight, but definite, positional advantages, by a series of almost imperceptibly advantageous moves; and, then, suddenly, Martin discovered that one of his pieces was on the point of being trapped; and, in his endeavor to save the piece, he made a move which still further impaired his position. Like a general confronted with a choice between two evils, he weakened a good strategic position to prevent an army corps being captured elsewhere. He saved the army corps; but it was a mistake, for—if he had not been afraid of complications—he could have defended it, indirectly, by an attack elsewhere; and the mistake was not overlooked by the enemy.

Though, to the unpracticed eye, from move to move, little seemed to happen, the aspect of the board had greatly changed during the last half

hour. Nothing stirred in the room but the embers on the hearth, and the slow lifting of Martin's right hand, once every few minutes, to make his move. Each reply came soundlessly, imperceptibly, and immediately, changing very slightly the logical symmetry of the position, as by the shifting of a single grain of colored glass in a kaleidoscope. But the cumulative result, as of the slight changes that through endless æons evolve planets and armies and fleets and cities of men out of a fire-mist, was very great.

The end came without haste, but implacably and inevitably, as old age or death. Step by step, through a logical process, imperceptible from move to move, but steady as the stealing forward of the hour hand on a dial, Martin's position was out-flanked. His king was forced into the open; hemmed round; driven back against his own pawns and checkmated.

He leaned back in his chair, staring at the board. Now that the game was ended, his tense concentration was succeeded by a curious calm, a relief like that of a man on trial for his life, when the verdict is finally given. For though he pinched the back of his left hand, digging his nails in till he brought the blood, to make sure that he was not dreaming, he knew that the position on the board was symbolical of something that had happened, irrevocably, in the larger field of his life. He knew, as birds know of the approach of thunder, that the unknown disaster was near, and that the invisible sword was upraised to strike him down, impossible as it seemed, in that sheltered firelit study. What

unknown enemy of the body or the soul could enter there? He looked at the windows. They were high above the street and fastened securely.

A mad fear seized him for a moment. He rose hurriedly, darted across the room and locked the door. Then, with his forehead growing damp and cold, he unlocked a drawer in his desk, took out a revolver, slipped some cartridges into it, laid it beside the chessboard, and sat down again by the fire, to wait—for he knew not what.

Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes went by, and every tick of the clock was like a vital pulse of his own body. Then, making his heart leap like a trapped creature, the telephone bell beside his desk rang with what seemed to him a shattering violence in that expectant hush. He crossed the room, carrying his revolver with him, and took up the receiver.

"Yes," he said. "Who is it?"

The voice that replied—a woman's voice—he had not heard for twenty-five years, but he knew it at once, knew its every cadence, every tone, even the manner of the breathing. But oh, how could it happen! This chapter in his life had been torn out, and buried under the dust of all those dead springs and winters.

"Twenty-five years ago," the voice said, "you and I made a dreadful mistake; and now, God help us both, we must pay the penalty, though I hope His hand may fall less heavily on you and yours than it has fallen on me."

"I don't know who it is. What is your name?" he whispered, lying desperately, out of sheer panic;

but the unusual form of his reply was enough in itself to betray him.

"My name now," answered the voice, "is not the name by which you knew me; but you used to call me Diana."

"It's impossible—I."

"Yes; I know. The name is no proof of my identity; but you remember, of course, the circumstances of our parting—the railway platform where we walked, and how my crying upset you. You remember those lines you quoted when you were trying to persuade me that we should so soon and easily forget:

"For each day brings its petty dust
Our soon-choked souls to fill;
And we forget——"

"How does it go on?" said the voice. "I am forgetting even that, you see." But it sounded to Martin as though it had been cut short by a sob.

He waited for a moment. Then, almost as if he were saying the lines to himself, he answered:

"And we forget because we must,
And not because we will."

"Yes; you know me now," the voice answered. "I had to make sure of that before I told you; and oh; Everard, Everard, may God help you to bear it——Maurice is dead."

"What, in God's name, do you——"

"Maurice, my son Maurice, of whom you never knew; your son and mine, Everard. He is dead.

I had to tell him to-night. He rushed away from me, leaving me unforgiven. He shot himself outside the opera house, at your daughter's feet. They brought him here. Your wife and daughter came with him. They left me a few minutes ago. I don't know whether they understand yet. I am praying, on my knees, that God will help and comfort your poor girl; and forgive us for what we have done in our blindness. I can speak no more. I didn't know that we should ever speak to one another again. I am crying, Everard, crying from my heart."

The voice ceased abruptly. Martin called her name, hoarsely.

"Diana! For God's sake!"

It was twenty-five years since he had spoken her name. He had almost forgotten it; and his voice rang out, in this quiet study of his latter years, like the voice of a stranger.

But he was cut off finally now; and, as he replaced the receiver, another sound came to him. He turned towards the window and listened. A motor car—his own—was driving down the street.

He stood there, frozen, a listening statue. The car drew up at his front door. He heard the click of the lock; the quiet, dreadfully quiet entry of Helen and Pauline. There was no sound of voices as usual—only a shuffle of footsteps, as if the mother were supporting the daughter. But no voice—no word, no whisper! Not even a sound of weeping——

The front door closed. Footsteps—Pauline's, he knew—crossed the hall to his own locked door. The

handle was turned and released. Then he heard a dull sound as of two pleading hands thudding with open palms against the upper panels of the door; and then, a long low sobbing cry that shivered through his heart like an arrow:

"O, Daddie, Daddie, he's dead! He's dead!"

He moistened his lips, but he could not speak. He would have given his soul to be able to unlock the door; to take her in his arms and try to comfort her. But there was an end of all that now. Slowly, as if he were lifting an enormously heavy weight—for his will was cloven in two—he raised the revolver, thrust the muzzle into his gaping mouth and pulled the trigger.

The sharp report of the shot and the cries of the terrified women brought a heavy knocking and loud pealing at the front door, followed in a few minutes by the glint of dark helmets and uniforms, and the smell of London fog drifting in over the heads of the throng like a breath of the outer night. The study door was burst open upon a strange scene. It was one of the most cheerful and comfortable rooms, and Martin had chosen one of the ugliest means of killing himself there. He had fallen heavily backwards and looked as if he were wearing a crimson nightcap. Over his shattered skull, in front of the peacefully fluttering fire, stood the chess-table, on which the pieces of black ivory, undisturbed by his fall, still held the white king in their microcosmical checkmate.

III

THE WINE BEYOND THE WORLD

"Have you supped at the Inn of Apollo,
While the last light fades from the West?
Has the Lord of the Sun at the World's End
Poured you his ripest and best?
Oh, there's wine in that Inn of Apollo;

Wine, mellow and deep as the sunset
With mirth in it, singing aloud
As the skylark sings in a high wind,
High over a crisp, white cloud.
Have you laughed in that Inn of Apollo?"

At the ancient German village of Rosenheim, in those incredible years before 1914—for this is not a tale of war—there was an old, half-timbered inn, as beautiful as a fairy-tale and almost as true. It had gabled roofs, a host who resembled Hans Sachs, and it was famous for a wine so unimaginably mellow that it could only be described as a bottled sunset. It was unimaginably mellow in more ways than one, for it was the most costly wine in the world. For many years it had been reserved for the private use of the Emperor. Even the Emperor could only afford to drink one glass of it annually, and a very small glass at that—a mere thimbleful, hardly enough to spice the palate of a Black Forest gnome. It was known as the "Emperor's Wine," and the

sacramental fame of it was rolled upon the tongues of all the connoisseurs of the Rhineland. It was the unattainable dream; the vintage of the purple distance; the wine beyond the world.

If the Emperor drank only one glass a year, the twelve cobwebbed bottles of this nectar that still remained in the cellars of the ancient inn at Rosenheim, at the date when my story commences, might very well last him for a lifetime; but it was necessary to prevent mad poets and rich merchants and jolly bishops and other golden-banded bees of Bacchus from sipping, so a fancy price had been set upon it, very much as they set a fantastic figure upon a prize-winner at a dog show, and the price was fixed at three thousand marks a bottle.

It was rumored in Rosenheim, the tiny, clustering village whose elfin beehives and gardens and thatched roofs and rambling outside staircases all climbed and pointed to the inn as the center of their being, that the Emperor had desired to buy the entire stock of the precious vintage outright; but his annual visit to drink his single glass of wine was so glorious a rubric in the local calendar, that all Rosenheim viewed the suggestion with dismay. The inhabitants drew up a petition, the resident artist illuminated it, the Burgomaster himself presented it to His Majesty, and His Majesty graciously agreed to continue the ceremonial tradition *in sæcula sæculorum*. After all, it should be the pride and privilege of Emperors to give the common people as much innocent pleasure as His Majesty found convenient; and he knew that when he drank his annual glass of that divine beverage, his people

tasted it vicariously, and the mellow fire that flowed through the imperial veins rejoiced them all by proxy.

It was also rumored among the beehives and the thatched roofs, that the artist who had illuminated the successful petition to the Emperor had been allowed to smell the next cork that was drawn, and that, taking advantage of his position, as these lawless fellows often will, he had thrust the cork into his mouth and sucked it. This is not regarded, among connoisseurs, as the best way of forming an opinion upon either the body or the bouquet of a wine; but the effect upon the artist, the ecstatic expression of his countenance, was almost as great a tribute to the excellence of the wine as the punctual return of the Emperor. Indeed, the artist had become almost a legendary figure in Rosenheim. It was told by villagers who remembered him that for nearly a week after his misbehavior he had acted like a man intoxicated with joy, and that, on being questioned regarding the flavor of the crimson driblets that he had so nefariously secured, he quivered with renewed ecstasy from head to foot, flung up his arms and murmured "*Nunc dimittis.*" At the end of a week, in fact, he did actually depart, and he had never been seen in Rosenheim again, either because he preferred to dwell with his memories, or because, among some envious spirits, there had been some talk of punishing him for *Majestäts-Beleidigung*. After his departure, however, it was agreed that even if he had sucked an entire ruby drop from the cork it had not been wasted upon him; for the delight of the Emperor in his annual glass was necessarily

expressed with a certain ceremonial dignity and restraint; and, if it had not been for the emotion of a low-born artist, nobody else could ever have imagined the wonder of that wine.

Now, on a certain summer's day there arrived at that famous hostelry, in a large touring car, a Mr. and Mrs. Roland Gayley, of Newport, Rhode Island. They were a young bride and bridegroom, who were leaving the hours of their honeymoon behind them like a winding golden road through Europe. Mr. Roland Gayley was one of those tall young sons of the New World, who have the outward appearance of a Greek god, the wealth of a Cræsus, and the happy-go-lucky temperament of a d'Artagnan. His bride was one of those daughters of the New World who have beaten the Frenchwoman with her own weapons. She was a consummate artist in the tilt of a hat, and in what—one regrets to say—she described as the "slinkiness" of a gown. Physically, too, she was a goddess: Diana at breakfast, Hebe at lunch, and Aphrodite in the evening. There was just the happy difference between their tastes that makes for harmony. Mr. Gayley liked Europe because it was old, and like all true Americans he was very indignant whenever he discovered the slightest attempts at progress in the customs of the Old World. Mrs. Gayley also liked Europe for the purposes of a honeymoon; but she liked it somewhat as a lover of musical comedy will turn to a Chinese fantasia for an hour's amusement. She had no desire to live permanently among the mandarins. They often argued the matter during their lovers' pilgrimage to the shrines

of the great poets and musicians of the "Dark Ages," as Mrs. Gayley called them. But she threw herself enthusiastically into Mr. Gayley's romantic scheme of paying tribute, sometimes with gifts of flowers, and sometimes in a more substantial way, to their memory. Mr. Gayley's chief argument, in fact, was from old books, old wine, old violins, and old friends; and in all these matters Mrs. Gayley agreed with him, though she affirmed that the merit was not entirely in their age, even in the case of the wine.

She declared, moreover, that for practical purposes she preferred the comforts of her house at Newport to the most romantic ruins of the Middle Ages; and knowing full well that her husband only enjoyed ruins because he was not obliged to live in them, she was greatly amused at his distress over what he called "the putting of new wine into old bottles." "In England," he said, "you have the modern spirit with a medieval equipment; in Germany you have the modern equipment with a medieval spirit. Surely there must be some inn beyond the pinewoods, some unsuspected valley beyond the world, where we can find the old wine in the old bottles? I have an idea. We will end our wedding tour with a visit to the famous inn at Rosenheim, where, I am told, they have a very marvelous wine; and you will forgive me for saying so, honey"—this term of endearment was a regrettable lapse into modernism; but, after all, the bees that swarmed upon the lips of the Greek poet might have liked it; Mr. Gayley certainly used it, and truth requires it—"you will forgive me for saying so, honey, but I believe it's the oldest wine in existence."

And so—with that enchanted gleam before them—they had rambled through the Middle Ages, reconciling two forms of happiness that are usually, and falsely, held to be incompatible—the joy of life and the beauty of the past. Mr. Gayley, indeed, was something of a poet, and he expressed himself in two ways. In the morning he sometimes amused himself by putting into light verse his opinions and impressions of persons and places. Once or twice recently an editor had sent him a check almost large enough to buy him a box of cigars. As a general rule, however, he wrote for private circulation, and indulged occasionally in the luxury of a sumptuous little edition, printed on handmade paper, at his own expense, and distributed on feast days among his friends.

In the afternoon he would compose a poem of an entirely different kind while he was smoking the post-luncheon cigar that he had earned so pleasantly. He was very much of a poet indeed at this time, and there was nothing trivial about his mood as he composed the menu for the evening dinner. Every detail had to be considered, down to the color harmonies of the flowers, the wines, and the sauces.

Both of these forms of happiness were considered in the scheme of their ramble through Europe. To one little village on a river of Elfland, whose name shall never be torn from me, they had journeyed for the purpose of eating lampreys. But they were divine lampreys, fattened in a stream whose banks were knotty with the roots of vines, and their very mud an essence of vine leaves. The flavor of those lampreys—— But no apology is necessary for those

joyous wanderers. Keats at least would have wished them well; and, as for those who love in cottages, there is surely a happiness in the thought that, once in the history of the world, two lovers were entirely free from care and could obtain everything that they desired.

Once or twice they had followed a mere will-o'-the-wisp of humor. They went to Rüdesheim for the sole purpose of seeing the castle of Boosenburg, where a descendant of Count Johann Boos had once won an entire village in a wager by emptying a jack-boot full of wine at a single draught. Mr. Gayley maintained, however, in the poem that he wrote upon his memorable feat, that it could hardly have been accomplished by a mere descendant, and that it must be attributed to the noble founder of the line, Count Johann Boos himself.

After this frivolous excursion, they had visited Weimar and left a magnificent bunch of roses at number twelve, Schiller Street. They went to Ilmenau and walked through the woods to the little wooden shooting-box on the site where Goethe had sung and slept, and they scattered violets wherever they thought he had trodden.

They had visited the Black Forest and picnicked in the woods. Mr. Gayley had sent a chef with a specially constructed table ahead of them in another motor car, without the knowledge of Mrs. Gayley. He had then led her through the woods by various romantic ways, until in a deep glen they had come by surprise upon the table decked with the red lights of fairyland and saw the white-capped chef and his

waiter peering like gnomes through the tall ferns behind it.

And now, finally, they had arrived at Rosenheim, the goal of their quest, and the home of the wine beyond the world. On the morning of their arrival Mr. Gayley's poem had been more severe than usual, for he had noticed several distressingly modern suggestions in the local newspaper. He composed his poem while he was refreshing himself in a pine-cone bath after his journey; but he was unable to eliminate what might be called the local color of his own country. He entitled it *The Reformers*, and it ran thus:

“‘If I were the blue-bird that fashioned the sky,’
Said the little blue wizard to me,
With a flirt of his wings and a flash of his eye,
As he perched in the crab-apple tree,
‘If I were the Master-Magician, I’d make
The universe over again for our sake.

“‘The world should be all under blue-bird control,
And boys should be just of a size
For me and my missus to swallow ’em whole
Like spiders or honey-fed flies;
While earth should have nothing but trees on her breast,
Where blue-birds like me and my missus could nest.’

“‘If I were the web-footed Wizard you mean,’
Croaked a fat little bullfrog below,
‘I should bubble and squeak in an oozier green
Than aught in the world that we know;
While your saccharine song would grow vital and harsh,
For I’d turn the whole universe into a marsh.’

“Oh, crimson as wine were the beautiful beads
 Of his eyes, as he stared at the West,
 And croaked, ‘I’d have nothing but puddles and reeds!
 I don’t see the use of a nest!
 I’d have myriads of gnats’ (his eyes blackened like blood),
 ‘And legions of wives all asprawl in the mud——’

“‘If I were the mouse that created us all,’
 A squeak in the wainscot began,
 ‘I am sure I could mold this terrestrial ball
 On a more economical plan;
 It’s a matter, I think, for ironical mirth,
 That the moon should be cheese while the mice are on
 earth.’

“‘If I were the Queen of the Universe,’ purred
 The little black witch with the claws,
 ‘How the mouse and the frog and the mesmerized bird
 Would love the red yawn of my jaws!
 How the redolent houses would rustle with rats
 If the world were arranged for the comfort of cats!

“‘How men, at one twitch of my whiskers, would fly
 To fetch me my milk in a bowl;
 And how, at one wink of my wicked green eye,
 They would feed me on salmon and sole;
 How sweetly my kittens would sleep overhead,
 In the very best sheets of the very best bed.’

“‘If I could remodel Cosmopolis,’ cried
 The man on the tub to the crowd.
 ‘We’ve heard the suggestion before,’ they replied,
 And they melted away like a cloud.
 For they thought it might lead to some dreadful mistakes
 If he made the world over again for their sakes.

“ ‘It is better,’ they growled, ‘that to each should be given
His own bit of bliss, if you please,
Than that earth should be turned into somebody’s heaven,
Which might be a marsh or a cheese;
For the child of the sun must endure for a night
Lest, abolishing shadows, he lose the world’s light.

“ ‘There are myriads of bitter, black wrongs to redeem,
But the very best way to begin,
Is for each to go home with a definite scheme
For scotching his own little sin;
It’s a pretty grim task, for we’re mostly beginners,
But a world without sin isn’t fashioned by sinners!’ ”

The menu for the evening, too, was a very charming lyric; but it did not strike either Mr. or Mrs. Gayley as a masterpiece until it was presented to the head-waiter, when they presumed that it must be something unusual by the extraordinary confusion of that gentleman’s features.

“The Emperor’s Wine!” he gasped, as if he had felt the foundations of his house moving. Then, recovering himself, he smiled condescendingly and murmured a mild reproof into Roland Gayley’s ear. “This wine, sir, is the famous vintage that only the Emperor can afford to drink. I am afraid it is not for ordinary mortals, and that you will not care to pay the price.”

Now this was the first time in his life that Roland Gayley had been treated, even by a Herr Ober, with that kind of benevolence; and, though he was the most amiable of beings and had never lost his temper in his life, all the pugnacity of his father, the Steel King, gleamed for a moment in his eyes.

"I did not ask the price," he replied. "I ordered the wine."

"But the wine is t'ree t'ousand marks a bottle, sir. It is the Emperor's Wine."

Mrs. Gayley stiffened slightly. Her eyes were fixed on her husband's face, and this, of course, determined him. It must be remembered that, young as they were, they could hardly rid themselves of their possessions if they lived to be a thousand.

"I am afraid my German is not good," said Roland Gayley, looking at the head-waiter's agitated face with the calm of the Steel King during a Wall Street panic. "I have already told you that I did not inquire about the price. I ordered the wine."

The head-waiter turned away dumbly and held a kind of international conference in the corner of the room with a Swiss and an Italian waiter. Again he approached the strange visitors.

"I wish to understand quite correctly," he said. "You have ordered a bottle of the Emperor's Wine."

"Certainly."

"At t'ree t'ousand marks a bottle?"

Mr. Gayley chuckled happily. He was never angry. What was the use, when you had sixty millions to play with, and a sense of humor? "At three thousand marks a bottle," he repeated. "Is this a debating society?"

For the second time the head-waiter retired in dumb distress. If this were a genuine offer, of course, an entirely new problem was raised. The price had not been put upon the wine in order to tempt lunatics. It was a precaution, not a bait. On

the other hand, three thousand marks was a great deal of money. The proprietor might desire to sell a bottle at that price, if he could do so secretly, and without destroying the tradition of his inn. The visitors were evidently persons of consequence. They had ordered a dinner that commanded his respectful attention. There was a second international conference in the corner; then the Herr Ober resolved that this was too great a matter for his own judgment, and that it must be referred to the landlord himself. The Swiss waiter was dispatched to find him, and in a few minutes the potentate of the inn appeared, wiping his mouth and marching forward like a major-general, with the entire staff at a respectful distance behind him.

He ran his imperial eye over the visitors and smiled.

"You have made a mistake," he said. "This wine that you have ordered is very costly. The Emperor himself drinks less than a thimbleful once a year."

"I quite understand," said Mr. Gayley. "Madame here is a little tired, and a glass of this good wine is just what she would like as a restorative with her dinner."

"But you do not understand. Even if it were sold by the glass it would cost you a t'ousand marks, and it is only sold by the bottle. The price is t'ree t'ousand marks."

"I have ordered a bottle," said Mr. Gayley, still chuckling, but with the dangerous glint in his eyes again. It was the first time that Mrs. Gayley had

become aware of the reincarnation of the Steel King in her husband, and she watched him with awe.

"The only thing I don't understand," he continued, "is why everybody in this confounded inn wants to come and talk to me about the dinner I've ordered. Do you usually argue with your guests about the price of things?"

"But I fear you do not understand. Are you aware that this wine——"

"Look here, my friend, don't wave that napkin in my face! I don't object to your having Emperors and cathedrals and things, so why should you object to my spending my pocket-money just as I please? Now if this is really an inn, where things can be bought to eat and drink, will Your Majesty please tell my waiter to bring me what I ordered from your own wine-list."

The landlord bowed, and retired in confusion, followed by his entire staff. A dramatic hush brooded over the inn. It was nearly ten minutes before he or any of his satellites reappeared. Part of the time had been used—as was disclosed later—in cross-examining the chauffeur about the strange visitor's ability to pay his bills. The chauffeur had spoken quite frankly and had talked in very large figures. He had explained that three thousand marks meant about as much to Mr. Gayley as a *pfennig* to the local baron. He had even produced newspapers and certain documentary evidence to prove that Mr. Gayley was the son of the Steel King. The results were admirable.

The hush of the dining-room was broken at last by the footsteps of the landlord and the staff re-

turning. There was a whisper of "Amerika" and "Kolossal" somewhere outside. Then they all entered in stately procession, and with not a little of the pomp that they had hitherto reserved for the visits of the Emperor.

The landlord came first, carrying the sacramental bottle, as if it were the most precious baby in the world; as if, in fact, it were a little Crown Prince; as if the cobwebs that clothed it were more costly than all the silks of the Empress; and as if every grain of dust that clung to it were more radiantly beautiful than the most priceless jewel of the imperial diadem. Behind him came the Herr Ober, carrying a voluminous white napkin, as if it were destined for some sublime hieratical function; and behind him again all the other Obers, in order of precedence, and distinctly awe-stricken, followed at a discreet distance as if they were expecting an explosion.

Even the vivacious Mrs. Gayley was a little awed by the solemnity of the proceedings.

"Do you think we really ought, Roland?" she murmured. "It seems to mean so very much to the poor dears."

But it was too late to draw back. The precious red blood of the sun, of which even the Emperor drank only one thimbleful in a year, was already winking in the glasses of those two visitants from the New World. The costly bubbles, the least of which must have been worth a week's pay to any of the officiating hierophants, were bursting and evaporating with a heart-breaking carelessness. Mr. and

Mrs. Gayley raised their glasses. They touched them together. They smiled at the landlord.

"Prosit," said Roland.

"Prosit," said Madame.

Then came the tragedy. The wine had no sooner touched the lips of Mr. and Mrs. Gayley than they rose to their feet, spluttering.

"Ugh! How disgusting!" said Madame.

"Ugh! Bilge!" gasped Roland.

"*Um Gottes Himmels Willen!*" cried the landlord.

The Herr Ober rushed forward with his napkin to wipe the spilled wine from the dress of Madame, while the Ober who came next in precedence performed the same office for the trousers of Roland.

The two visitors recovered themselves more quickly than the staff of the inn, who stood trembling around them, looking from one to the other in a chaos of interrogation.

"Now I understand," said Roland, "why the Emperor only calls for one thimbleful in the year."

"And spits it into his handkerchief," said Madame, shuddering again.

"Landlord," said Roland calmly, "this wine is too glorious for me. It is worse than high treason—it is blasphemy for ordinary mortals to drink it. Bring us very quickly a bottle of this Rhine wine"—he indicated a number on the wine list—"this, you understand, at four marks a bottle. Be quite sure that you understand. We shouldn't like to drink the Emperor's Wine again by mistake."

"But vot shall I do with this bottle of the Em-

peror's Wine?" said the landlord, in a voice husky with emotion.

"I have bought it," said Roland, "and, of course, it must be put down upon the bill. I understand that it is your birthday to-morrow. I give it to you for a birthday present."

The landlord retired, overwhelmed with his good fortune, and the dinner eventually proved to be quite worthy of its composer.

"How fortunate it is," said Roland, as he lighted his cigar, "that even when one has a great deal of money it is always possible to procure the wine that is drunk by those who have little."

"But you know, Roland, this proves everything that I have said about the Old World. I am sure it is all just like that, if the poor dears would only understand," said Madame.

Roland lighted her cigarette. "I wonder," he said thoughtfully, "I wonder what became of that artist."

IV

BILL'S PHANTASM

THE married life of a sailor is often a succession of surprises. His arrivals and departures are ruled by the weather, and long absences lend new faces to the most familiar household gods. He leaves his newly wedded wife, a lonely, girlish figure, waving her lily hand from a tarry wharf, in the affecting style of the best ballads, and he returns to find a buxom young matron, comparatively uninterested in him, and strongly supported by twins. He can wake few chords of memory in his offspring. They regard him as a stranger, and they squint and scream at his uncouth advances.

The adage that gives the sailor "a wife in every port" is a very shallow one, and very inadequate as an attempt to suggest his possibilities of adventure. There is a wider range for comedy and tragedy in his home affairs, and a richer field there for the psychologist than could be found in any insubstantial isles of Circe. The face that meets the returning sailor is never quite the one that he left behind him.

Consider, moreover, the complicated lot of a mariner who discovers in himself, after marriage, an unsuspected streak of uxoriousness. Let his wife be fair to look upon. Grill him for a long sea-voyage over the slow fires of jealousy. The result, occasion-

ally, will be one of those tragedies that delight the Sunday newspaper. As a rule, the result is comedy (and for anything we are likely to receive in the shape of comedy, nowadays, may the Lord make us most truly thankful).

Bill Hutchins, the mate of the *Susanna*, had endured some of these mental discomforts for nearly five years now. He was fortunate in that the *Susanna*, being a steam trawler, made short voyages. He was not often away from home for more than three weeks at a time. But he was unfortunate in the skipper.

Joseph Morgan, or Cap'n Joe, as he was called by his friends, was a gap-toothed, gray-bearded misogynist, with a sardonic tongue and little malicious eyes that bored into his victims like gimlets. He had observed the anxieties of the mate; and, on every voyage, he had taken a fiendish delight, almost worthy of his piratical appearance, in stimulating them. On this last voyage he had surpassed himself. He had behaved like an Old Man of the Sea, possessed with the spirit of Iago.

"You're in an 'urry to get 'ome, I can see, Bill," he said on the night before their return. "It's very nateral; but I don't see what you've got to worry about, a young 'andsome chap like you. Besides, you've only been married a short time, and it's very seldom anything goes wrong under three years. Let's see, is it three? No; it's five years you been married, Bill, ain't it? Longer than I thought. Well, *you* ain't got nothing to worry about, anyway. It would take a long time to get tired of a chap like you. You're too modest, Bill."

The two men stood in the warm shelter of the funnel. The crew was hauling the nets:

"Of course, a seaman never really knows what kind of a woman he's married," Cap'n Joe continued, "and he can't tell what may be going on at 'ome. It 'as its advantages and its disadvantages. If she's a bad-tempered woman, he may just miss the 'ot end of the poker. But then again, supposing she's an angel, he don't see her little white wings unfolding; and, of course, it's no satisfaction to an 'usband to know that other folks may be using her feathers for pipe-cleaners."

"Don't you worry about that," said Bill sullenly. "My wife ain't that sort of a woman, and I'll thank you not to blacken 'er blurry character."

"You are too sensitive, Bill. Feathers was what I said, and the illusion was to angels. I didn't mention nobody's wife in particular; so how can I be blackening 'er blurry character? I was only suggesting that a sailor don't see his wife very often. I knew the mate of a cattle-boat one time, sailing from Liverpool to Rio. His wife was one of these 'ere kleptomaniacs—one of these pore women 'as can't help stealing anything that takes their fancy, from an 'andful of monkey-nuts to a diamond tarara. But 'e never knew it. She served 'er sentence—a month's hard—while he was away at sea; and, when he came back, she was at a new address, so that the neighbors couldn't talk. There was clean white curtains on the windows, and boxes full of scarlet geraniums on the window-sills; and a brand new doormat, with 'WELCOME' on it, in the 'all. It come out, arterwards, that she brought it 'ome inside of an

umbreller from a bargain-sale. But 'er 'usband never discovered it. She was one of them innocent-eyed doll-babies, too. Even the judge couldn't 'ardly believe her guilty. I tell you, Bill, there's only one way for a sailor to get at the truth."

"And what's that?" said the mate, unable to suppress a desire for information.

"Why, look out for the red 'errings. 'Aven't you 'eard of red 'errings, Bill? This little doll-baby always 'ad a lot of tracks and religious books in the parlor when 'er 'usband came home. Red 'errings they were, to throw him off the scent. Now, if 'e'd been smart enough to see that they didn't exactly accord with her likings in the way of reading, which always ran to them pink novelettes, like 'The Secret of Lady Mary' (which was bigamy) in the *Forget-Me-Not* series, why, then 'e'd 'ave known that she was playing a game, see? and perhaps he'd have discovered what it was. Always look out for the uncommon things, Bill, the things that look all very innocent and 'igh faluting, but just a leetle odd or unusual, like reading serious books or going to lectures on Shakespeare. In nine cases out of ten they're red 'errings, and just meant to distrack your attention, same as a lapwing does, when it tumbles 'ead over 'eels and screams to lead you away from its nest."

"There's no danger, thank you, Joe, so far as I'm concerned," said Bill freezingly.

"Ah," said Cap'n Joe, "but marriage is a deep sea, Bill, a very deep sea. It's all moonlight and blue waves on the top, as pretty as a moving picture; but, when you begin to haul the nets—the same as

we're doing here—you never know what you're going to fetch out of it. Look at that now!"

A big fold of the net had just been drawn dripping from the dark water. The deck was alive with floundering silver. One 14-lb. dog-fish flapped snapping up to their feet, where it twisted over and tore at the meshes. Two dots, like lidless eyes, and a wide shark-mouth in the white underside of that huge flat head, grinned at the moon in ghastly parody of the human countenance.

"Looks a darned sight more like a blurry shark than a red 'erring," grunted Bill, turning away to lend the crew a hand. He was in a hurry, as the skipper had noticed, and that touch of nature soon made him indistinguishable from the other men laboring at the net, dark figures mailed with scales of silver and smeared with red from the gills of the slippery masses of cod and halibut.

Cap'n Joe lit his pipe pensively. The match in the hollow of his hand brought his wicked old features, lined and seamed by a thousand storms, into brilliant relief against the sooty funnel.

"Sharks, lobsters, cuttle-fish, porpoises," chuckled the old man, just loudly enough for the mate to hear him. "There's nothing from shrimps to sea-sarpints that you can't haul out of the holy seas of matrimony, Bill. But *my* advice is, look out for the smoked variety—look out for the red 'errings."

There was nothing unusual in the appearance of his trim white cottage on the hill when Bill Hutchins came clumping up the winding path to his door three days later. His first inkling of anything new was

the mocking light in the eyes of his old flame, Rosie Martin, the innkeeper's daughter, who met him at his garden gate under the lilac bush.

"Look out, Bill," said this young lady, licking her full red lips with a touch of malice.

"Look out," said Bill severely, for the phrase was getting on his nerves. "Look out. What d'you mean? Nothing wrong with Susie or the kids, is there?"

Miss Martin tossed her head.

"There's nothing wrong with them—yet," she said enigmatically. "I only said 'look out.' Susie's got a visitor, that's all."

The mate scowled at her.

"Poor old Bill," she laughed. "Jealous as ever. Don't be frightened. It's only a lady visitor. Leastways, Susie says she's a lady. Looks more like a red 'erring to me."

The casual phrase struck home, and Bill winced. He was not versed in the law of chances, and it seemed to him for a moment that there must be a universal conspiracy to bait him.

"Sorry if she's a friend of yours, Bill," said Rosie Martin. "She's a bit too 'igh class for me." Then, raking him with a sidelong glance from her large black eyes (which in his earlier days the mate had poetically likened unto damsons) she danced past him in a provocative version of the one-step, and ran laughing down the hill. Mr. Hutchins shook his fist at her supple figure as she went.

"Dosh garn you, Rosie Martin," he shouted, using the spooneristic expletive to which he was liable in moments of emotion. The girl turned, threw him a

kiss, and then disappeared into the lane below, singing like a blackbird between the white-flowering hawthorns:

“Every nice girl loves a sailor,
Every nice girl loves a tar;
For there’s somethink
Abaht a sailor—
Oh, well, you *know* what sailors are!
Free and easy,
Bright and breezy——”

The voice died away towards the village. “Dosh garn you, Rosie Martin,” the mate said again to himself, smiling a little grimly as he remembered the dance that this lively damsel had once led him. “There’s plenty of fun in Rosie Martin for a temporary sweetheart,” he thought. “But Lord help the man that marries her.” None the less, he continued to smile as he walked to the cottage.

The door opened abruptly. His wife stood on the threshold. She was a golden-haired, comely, and demure young woman with solemn blue eyes. A small boy clung to her skirt.

“Hallo, Bobbie! Hallo, Susie! Give us a kiss,” said the mate. There was a moment of domestic reunion. Then Mr. Hutchins became aware of something frosty in the atmosphere, a chill that spread from the unseen presence of a stranger in the best parlor.

“Who’s your visitor?” he then whispered.

He was answered by the appearance of a woman at the parlor door—a tall, raw-boned, red-haired woman, with a long, dry freckled face and sandy

eyelashes. Everything about her, except the perverse and crazy eye, had been included in Rosie Martin's terse description. She was undoubtedly a lady from loftier spheres. and she undoubtedly looked like a red herring.

"This is Miss Perkins, Bill," said Mrs. Hutchins nervously. "She's been very good to me while you were away. She's 'elped me to get in tune."

"In tune?" said the puzzled Mr. Hutchins. "You haven't been buying a piano, have you, Susie?"

"In tune with the *Beyond*," said Miss Perkins in a deep contralto. "He doesn't understand yet. How should he?" She swept forward and took charge of the situation, while little Bobbie made gooseberry eyes at her from behind his mother.

"I hope," said the strange visitor to Mr. Hutchins, "I *do* hope that you wrote down the date."

"The date? What date?" said Bill, looking from one face to another in bewilderment.

"The date of your accident," said Miss Perkins. "You were bitten, you know."

"Bitten?" said the mate. "I'd like to know 'oo bit me. This is all news to me."

"You must have forgotten, Bill," his wife began; but Miss Perkins interrupted:

"Wait a minute, Mrs. Hutchins, or you may put ideas into his head. We ought to question him very carefully. The intellectual scalpel should be sterilized as carefully as that of the surgeon. Let me see." She consulted a notebook. "It was his right arm, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Let's have a look at your right arm, Bill."

Mr. Hutchins rolled up the sleeve of his blue

jersey and bared a muscular forearm, perfectly normal and undamaged, except for the realistically tattooed picture of Susanna escaping from the Elders.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Miss Perkins," cried Mrs. Hutchins hastily. "I forgot that Bill had that picture on his arm." Miss Perkins blinked.

"I'm sorry, too," said Bill, rolling his sleeve down again. "I thought that was what you wanted the lady to see. It's done beautiful from an artistic point of view. All artists are like that. You can't argue with them. I'd have liked it toned down a little myself; but, as the artist said, 'You'll 'ave your own clothes on, even if Susanna don't; so where's the odds? Truth is truth,' he said, 'and I won't palter with my artistic integrity, or sell my soul,' he says, 'even if I have to starve for it.' Besides, it's a Bible picture, ain't it?"

"We wished to see the marks of the bite," said Miss Perkins, without answering the question. "I'd better explain, Mr. Hutchins. Four nights ago you were bitten . . . that is, you appeared to your wife and *told* her that you had been bitten."

"By a shark," said Mrs. Hutchins.

"Quite," said Miss Perkins. "By a shark. Your right arm was badly swollen and we were afraid you had blood-poisoning. I heard of this remarkable communication from a resident here, who is entertaining several members, including myself, of the R.I.S.R. (The Royal Institute of Spiritualistic Research, you know.) Such communications, in fact, are not infrequent between husband and wife. At the request of my fellow guests (and you may be interested to know that Sir Joshua Boodle, the

eminent bimetallist, is among them) I have been making a careful record of the whole case. We hoped that you might be able to verify the details from your ship's log or your—er—dead reckoning, or whatever you call it. It's a strictly scientific question, you know. None of our members has any imagination. It's a curious fact that poets and artists are seldom interested in our methods."

"If I'd been bitten by a shark," said the mate, "I'd have verified it all right. But I never seen a shark."

"Curious," said Miss Perkins, regarding him with introspective eyes and cocking her head like a cross-examiner.

"Never seen anything worse than a dog-fish," the mate continued. "And an ugly brute he was, too."

"Ah," said Miss Perkins. "This is very interesting. The dog-fish belongs, I believe, to the shark family, a sort of first cousin. Now, did you handle this dog-fish?"

"Yes, mum."

"This is *most* interesting. What is that dark stain on your thumb-nail? Was there any blood on your hands after you had thrown this dog-fish overboard?"

"Yes, mum. But it was fish's blood——"

"Excuse me. That's an assumption. Tell him, Mrs. Hutchins, exactly what you saw."

"I had a dream, Bill," Susie began impressively.

"Far, far more than a dream," interrupted Miss Perkins. "It was a most interesting case of a phantasm of the living."

"I had a phantasm, Bill," Susie corrected herself.

"I saw you standing in the moonlight by the bedroom window; and your right hand was covered with blood, Bill; and you says to me, 'Susie,' you says, 'take care of the children. I been bitten by a shark.'"

"You see," said Miss Perkins. "In every detail it was correct. In fact, the more closely one examines the story the more wonderful it seems. There were you, hundreds of miles away, handling this—er—family connection of the shark, in the moonlight, with blood upon your right hand; and here was your dear little wife visualizing the whole thing at home. I think we shall find, when the whole story is properly written up, with the *stress* laid upon the *significant* points (*stress* is the secret of nearly *everything*, don't you think?), we shall have one of the most vivid cases in our records. How pleased Sir Joshua Boodle will be, and the dear Society! Good-by, Mrs. Hutchins, for the present. I must keep in touch with you and your good husband. Curious, isn't it, how much easier it is to keep in touch with the next world than to correspond regularly with one's friends? Rather like astronomy. Tee-hee-hee! Well, you and Mr. Hutchins have a very precious gift. How I envy you! Good-by."

The door closed behind her. Bill Hutchins looked at his wife with a grin. But there was no answering sign of amusement. She sighed. Her eyes were intensely serious. Her face was pale. Her hands moved nervously.

"'Oo's that woman?" said the mate.

"She's not a woman, Bill. She's a real lady from Lunnon."

"Balmy, I s'pose," said the mate tentatively.

"You oughtn't to say things like that, Bill. She's in tune with the Beyond, and she's a friend of Sir Joshua Boodle. It's been very pleasant for me while you've been away. They've asked me to tea twice, along of that phantasm."

"Along of that *what?*" cried Bill, staring at his wife as if she had suddenly become a perfect stranger.

"Phantasm, Bill, and some day you will see one yourself, I 'ope. They're going to ask us on a visit to Lunnon to meet the other members of the Society. Miss Perkins has given me a lot of beautiful books to read that will 'elp us both. Come and see."

The dumbfounded seaman followed his wife into the yellow plush parlor, which hitherto had been reserved for state calls from the curate or the doctor. The wax flowers were still there under the glass bell. Queen Victoria's picture still presided over other horrid treasures dear to the simple hearts of those with whom (if we are to believe those poets of the people who dine at the Ritz) the only truth and the only reality reside. But Susie pointed to an array of paper-covered books with strange titles, unrealities from an alien world.

"Take a squint at them, Bill, while I'm getting tea ready. There's one there about the next world and how to communicate with it, by Miss Perkins herself, and there's a *lovely* one about auroras. Everyone's got an aurora, only you can't see it unless you've got the right kind of an eye. Miss Perkins has got a mauve aurora. She says that mine's old rose, and Bobbie's is hedge-sparrow-egg blue. I

wonder what yours is? She's coming in to-morrow afternoon to have a good look at you. It's important to know what your aurora is."

"If the lady that ain't a woman is coming here again, Susie," said the mate indignantly, "mine will be the Aurora Borealis, and you may lay to that."

Even his tea did not mollify him, and Mrs. Hutchins was puzzled by his explosive references to "red herrings" during the meal whenever she tried to resume the subject. Bill's first evening at home, in fact, was a failure.

On the following day all Susie's pleadings were in vain. Bill crushed his hat on his head and said that he had an important engagement with Captain Joe at the Pig and Whistle at three o'clock.

"But Miss Perkins is coming specially to see you, Bill. She's taking a great interest in our case, and she wants to see your aurora."

"Why don't you 'ave a phantasm about it? Then she could discuss it with you. I'll come back when she's gone. How long do you thing she'll stay?"

"Oh, I can't possibly tell, Bill. She may decide to have a sitting."

"A sitting? What's that?"

"You don't understand, Bill; she can talk with the spirits."

Bill stared at her and made inarticulate sounds like a desperate hen when her solitary chick sails into the middle of the duck-pond.

"Well, I'm off to the Pig and Whistle," he said in a voice trembling with suppressed emotion. "I'll be back about eight o'clock, that'll give Miss Per-

kins and her spirits time to get back to the place where they belong."

He slammed the door behind him, drowning his description of the temperature of that place. Perhaps he was conscious of the misfire, for a moment later the door opened again and his face, contorted with fury, appeared in the crevice.

"I 'ope you'll sprinkle the 'ouse with 'oly water when they're gone," he said unctuously. "I *thought* I smelt brimstone last night, and if I was you I'd drop a line to the curick and tell him you want to 'ave little Bobbie baptized again."

This parting shot apparently satisfied him, for he closed the door softly this time and went on his way humming a song.

It was not by his own design that he met Rosie Martin in the village street, but the fates were weaving their web about him. The Pig and Whistle was not to see Bill Hutchins that afternoon. Nor did he return home at eight o'clock. Perhaps the conversation of Rosie was a relief to him after the intellectual assault and battery of the last few hours. Perhaps it was the thought of paying Susie out. Perhaps it was the exhilarating rush of the hired motor-car, or the steak and onions and stout for two at the half-way house, or the lights, the music and the shuffle of jazzing feet in the pier pavilion at Tarrytown-on-Sea; but, whatever the cause, Bill felt himself relapsing into the sensations of his bachelor days. It was not a very serious relapse. Fortunately for him, he was not the complete captain of his soul. But at ten o'clock, when Susie was looking out of her bedroom window for the four-

teenth time and the night looked lonelier than ever before, she might have heard—if she had been truly telepathic—twenty miles away, in a corner of the pier at Tarrytown, this ghostly fragment of a whispered conversation:

"No, you mustn't do that, Bill."

"Why not, Rosie?"

"'Cos you been eating onions."

And that was really the end of it, for the band struck up and swept them into the jazzing crowd again. But it was twenty miles to Tarrytown, and—

Late, late in the evening Bill Hutchins came home,
And nobody knew where Bill Hutchins had been.

It was after midnight when he knocked, a little sheepishly, at his own door. He was admitted by his agitated wife, whose nerves were none the better for the dark warnings transmitted to her earlier in the evening by the agency of Miss Perkins and planchette.

"Oh, Bill!" she cried, "where *you* been? I been so frightened!"

"Didn't I tell you I was going to see Captain Joe and talk things over at the Pig and Whistle?" said Bill, with the surprised air of the accomplished liar.

"Yes. But you said you'd be back at eight o'clock, and this is only your second night home, and it's after midnight, Bill."

"Ah, well," replied Bill, "we had a lot to talk about. Captain Joe is getting an elderly man now, and, if he retires, of course, I——"

"Was that what you were talking about? Why, Bill, you've been eating onions—that was exactly what the planchette——"

Susie broke off. Bill had given her fresh proofs of the veracity of that instrument, but she hesitated about mentioning them now, just as Bill would have hesitated probably about answering them with proof that both planchette and himself were liars.

"Well, come to bed, Bill. We'll talk it over in the morning," she said, and her voice was the murmur of doves in Lebanon. So for the next eight hours there was a truce to all metaphysics in the house of Mr. William Hutchins, though within five minutes he had woven a more tangled web than he knew.

On the next morning Mrs. Hutchins had laid the table for breakfast, the rashers were sizzling and the fragrance of the coffee-pot filled the house before her husband was out of bed. While she was waiting for him she picked up the local newspaper and glanced over the headlines. Her nerves had been somewhat strained of late, and at the sight of a certain prominent paragraph she had to bite her lips to suppress a scream. She read:

STRANGE DEATH OF AN ELDERLY SEAMAN

Alleged Secret Romance of Nautical Misogynist

"The career of Captain Joseph Morgan, well known in this neighborhood as Captain Joe, has come to a sad end. His body was discovered yesterday morning in the reservoir and was removed with difficulty, as it transpires that the unfortunate

man's head was firmly embedded in the feed-pipe through which the drinking water is conveyed to Tarrytown. Nothing is yet known to account for the tragedy. But late last night a statement was made to the police by Mrs. Hicks, the wife of a plumber. It appears from this statement that the deceased had cherished a hopeless passion for her. On the previous evening Mrs. Hicks was chased along the rim of the reservoir by an elderly satyr who bore close resemblance to Morgan, but she had left her spectacles in the family Bible at home, and it was growing dark, so that she cannot swear to his identity. She heard a splash, and supposes that he lost his footing and fell in, for that was the last she saw of him. Mrs. Hicks, who is an attractive woman inclined to *embonpoint*, believes that no mistake is possible. She heard the unhappy victim of her charms muttering something about 'red herrings' as he pursued her. This was a favorite witticism of Captain Morgan, she asserts. Captain Joe was popularly supposed, however, to be a confirmed woman-hater, and, unless further evidence transpires, his many friends will find it difficult to believe that a romance was the cause of his death. The affair has been complicated by the sudden appearance on the scene of another lady who claims to be his widow. It is a curious coincidence and suggestive of 'Time's Revenges' that the feed-pipe into which the elderly mariner's head was jammed had been laid in its present position by Mr. Hicks. Mr. Hicks is a man of few words, and, on being interviewed, though he corroborated the above statement, his only comment was, '*Verb. sap.*'

He is greatly respected in the neighborhood and has been a sidesman at St. Luke's Church for many years."

Mrs. Hutchins gasped. The paper slipped from her hands. Captain Morgan had actually appeared to her husband at the very moment when the account of his death was being printed. This was exactly the kind of phantasm for which Miss Perkins had been looking. She must get into touch with her at once. In the meantime she must cut the paragraph out of the newspaper and keep Bill in ignorance of what had happened. Otherwise the evidence might be vitiated.

Perhaps in reaction from the wrath of yesterday, Bill was unusually good-tempered at breakfast, and he answered his wife's questions with an innocent eye.

"Was Captain Morgan in good health last night, Bill?"

"Wonderful for a man of his age. We had a steak and onions together at the Pig and Whistle—(Susie remembered that corroborating kiss)—never saw an old man with such an appetite. Good spirits, too. You should have heard him laugh over some of the stories he told. Captain Joe is a woman-hater, you know. 'Look out for the red herrings,' he says. Another cup of coffee, please, Susie."

For half an hour Bill continued, eating, drinking and inextricably entangling himself with every word he uttered. When he had finished his breakfast Susie announced that she had to go down to the village. She obtained a promise from him that he

would smoke his pipe in the back garden and not leave the premises till she returned. She gave him the newspaper, explaining that she had cut out a new recipe for the stuffing and roasting of pork. Then, without a hint that she was going to consult the visiting members of the Society, she left him to his own thoughts in the sunshine.

They were not very comfortable thoughts. He was truly penitent this morning, and the sincerity of his remorse was not lessened by the fear that Susie might come to hear of his adventure.

It was nearly noon when she returned, but his penitence had not allowed him to become restive. In fact, when Susie came into the garden and told him, in a grave whisper, that three gentlemen were waiting in the parlor and they wanted to see him on business, he arose and followed her as meekly as a schoolboy summoned to punishment.

His first glimpse of the solemn group in the parlor was a distinct shock to him. Standing on the hearth-rug were three very serious old gentlemen with bald crowns, white fringes of hair and bushy white beards. They all looked exactly like a portrait of Charles Darwin that Bill had once seen. They scrutinized him fiercely.

"Lawyers," thought the conscience-stricken Mr. Hutchins. "Susie must have heard."

There was a portentous rustling behind him, as if the court were filling. He turned and saw Miss Perkins entering the room with two very stout matrons in deep mourning. These two ladies regarded each other with profound dislike; but as they both squinted slightly the unfortunate Mr. Hutchins

thought their disdainful glances were meant for himself. They were very much alike in build and feature, except that one was red-faced and the other pale. Behind them came a very determined-looking little man with fierce, spectacled eyes and a jaw like the ram of a destroyer.

"This," said Susie, leading forward the red-faced matron, "is Mrs. Hicks."

"*Verb. sap.*," said the determined little man behind her.

The three Darwins bowed.

"And this," said Susie, leading forward the pale-faced matron, "is the widow, though she hasn't seen him for twenty years."

"Never see him any more," said the fierce little man.

The three Darwins bowed again.

"Very 'appy, I'm sure," said the widow, mopping her eyes with a virgin handkerchief to which the shop ticket still clung. Mrs. Hicks tossed her head slightly and tapped the floor with her right foot as she noticed it. For a moment she restrained herself, but the opportunity was too good to be resisted. She nudged the widow in the side.

"Excuse me, my dear," she said, "'adn't you better remove that ticket? You may 'urt yourself."

The widow glared at her. Both of those ample bosoms heaved dangerously. Susie intervened.

"I'll bring you *both* some sherry and a biscuit in a minute," she whispered, just as if it had been a funeral.

Bill grew more and more puzzled. Could anyone

have died and left him a legacy? Were they going to read a will? His face brightened.

"This," said Susie, pointing to the fierce little man, "is Mr. Hicks."

"Few words," said Mr. Hicks, nodding to the three Darwins one after another. "Very few words—*verb. sap.*"

"And this," said Susie solemnly, pointing to Bill, "is my husband."

"Ah, hum!" said the three Darwins. "Very interesting. Spiritual type, very. May we all sit down? We should like to ask him a few questions."

There was a polite scrambling for chairs, in the course of which Bill just contrived to mutter savagely into Susie's ear, "'Oo are those blurry old gorillas?" But there was no time for a reply before he found himself seated on a three-legged stool in the center of a ring of intense faces.

Darwin Number One sat fronting him and seemed to be studying the bumps on his forehead. Darwin Number Two sat on the left and was so deeply interested that he kept tickling Bill's ear with his beard. Darwin Number Three was equally interested and tormented the right ear in the same way.

"We should like," said Darwin the First, "to ask you about your conversation last night with Captain Joseph Morgan at the Pig and Whistle. Do you remember the nature of it?"

"Certainly," said Bill, drawing on his recollection of former conversations at sea. "He was saying that it wouldn't be long now before I might take his berth on the *Susanna*. He's an elderly man, and knows it will be sooner or later."

"Most interesting. Very direct," said Darwin the Second, moving his chair closer. "What else did he talk about?"

"Why," said Bill, "he was telling me stories most of the time, stories and limericks about women."

"Ah!" said Darwin the Third, clearing his throat savagely against Bill's right ear.

"Can you remember any of those stories or limericks?" asked Darwin the First coaxingly. He, too, was edging his chair up in front, and his beard wagged in threatening proximity to Bill's eyes and nose.

"I think so," said Bill, rummaging again in his memory for odds and ends with which Cap'n Joe had enlivened night watches at sea.

"Did any of them strike you as at all peculiar?"

"There was one of his rhymes that struck me as very peculiar," said Bill. "It was about a plumber."

"Ah, exactly," said Darwin the First.

"Precisely," said Darwin the Second.

"Just so," said Darwin the Third.

"Continue," said all three Darwins together.

"It went somehow like this," said Bill, desperately reminiscent:

"Into the drinking well
Which the plumber built her
Aunt Jemima fell——
We must get a filter."

"That's *my* name!" sobbed the widow. "He always called *me* 'Aunt Jemima.' It was his pet name for me like."

"Sherry and a biscuit," whispered Susie nudging her with a tray from behind.

"Really, this is most amazingly complete," said Darwin the First, sitting back and admiring Bill as if he were solely responsible.

"A plumber, mark!" said Darwin the Second.

"If *I* may be allowed to speak," said Mrs. Hicks, all her beads aquiver with satisfaction at the cue, "I suppose the reservoir *might* be called a drinking-well in a way. Only it was himself that fell into it, pore soul!" She looked disdainfully at the widow.

"Sherry *and* a biscuit?" said Susie at her elbow. Mrs. Hicks helped herself with dignity, whispering, "Don't give any *sherry* to Mr. Hicks. Everyone's been treating him this morning, along of that feed-pipe, and he's got that nasty look in his eye."

"It's true of course, as Mrs. Hicks has pointed out, that it was the unfortunate man himself who got drowned," said Darwin the Third. "But one has to remember that messages of this kind should be interpreted in the dry light of the man's character, which, I take it, was of a sardonic color. It would be just like him to make a grim joke of the matter."

"Precisely," said Darwin the First. "The number of—er—bull's-eyes that have been made in this affair is really astounding."

"Exactly," said Darwin the Third. "It's the final demonstration, the climax and crown of a long accumulation of evidence."

"Quite, quite conclusive," said Darwin the Second. "Make a careful note of that, please, Miss Perkins."

It is worth plowing through a wilderness of sand to hit upon these grains of gold."

"Now, did you see Captain Morgan's face quite plainly while he was talking to you? There was nothing misty or vague about it, I suppose? You felt quite sure that he was—er—really there?" said Darwin the First.

"I see'd him as plain as I see you now, sir," replied the mate, feeling more and more like a bumble-bee in a spider's web as the three bushy white beards badgered him from side to side, irritated him in turn and then caressed him all together.

At this point a shadow darkened the window. Bill looked up and—to his horror—though he could not quite see how matters could be made worse, he was aware of Rosie Martin walking up the garden path towards the front door. Susie excused herself and went out of the room to meet her. For the next half-hour Bill saw out of the corner of his eye that Rosie and Susie were wandering up and down the garden with their arms about each others' waists. He felt that he had been abandoned to the mercy of his examiners, and he distrusted the conversation that was taking place outside. It was a pretty picture—the blonde head and the brunette whispering together under the lilac tree. But Rosie seemed to be doing most of the talking. Susie looked serious, almost angry. Then he heard them both laughing. He wondered what they were laughing about.

He was not allowed to escape from his inquisitors for fully an hour. The questions grew madder and madder. He would never have stood it except that he had a guilty conscience and felt he was too deeply

involved to withdraw. Besides, these old gentlemen had an air of vast authority which it was difficult to oppose. Miss Perkins addressed one of them as "Sir Joshua Boodle." Bill suspected them of being justices of the peace, for he had vague ideas on the machinery of the law. When they asked him anything unusually insane he supposed they were trying to trap him, especially as they always avoided all reference to anything that had actually occurred. They cross-examined him on the most absurd details. They attached great importance to the alleged remark at the Pig and Whistle about "red herrings." They even tried to trace some wild kind of connection between the name of the trawler, *Susanna*, the name of his wife, *Susie*, and the picture tattooed on his arm, *Susanna and the Elders*. Finally there was an awful moment, just as Susie re-entered the room, when Darwin the First lowered his voice. The questions became so startling that Bill began to wonder whether his tormentors were physicians endeavoring to prove him a lunatic. The muttering beards grew weirdly confidential.

"I want to ask you a question now about a matter that is of great controversial interest in many similar cases. When you saw Captain Morgan at the Pig and Whistle was he—er—*wearing any clothes?*" whispered Darwin the First, and all the three beards tickled Bill horribly as they closed in upon him.

"Certainly," said Bill. "He wouldn't have stayed there long without 'em."

"Thank you. The controversial question in these cases, of course, is as to where and how the clothes are produced."

"He told me he always got 'em from Jenkins the draper, in Tarrytown," said Bill.

"Thank you. I don't think we need trouble you any more this morning, Mr. Hutchins. But when we have your statement drawn up, with the *significant* points properly *stressed*, we shall probably want you to sign it for publication. Good morning."

Miss Perkins and the three Darwins bowed themselves out very courteously. The two matrons followed, and as neither would give precedence to the other, they had to edge through the door sideways. Mr. Hicks nodded to his host and hostess and walked into the hall. A moment later he tiptoed stealthily back into the room, poured himself a glass of sherry, winked at Susie and drank it at a gulp.

"'Elp yourself," said the mate.

Mr. Hicks poured himself a second glass, winked and swallowed that also at a gulp.

"Do it again," said the mate.

Mr. Hicks obeyed and went through the process a third time in complete silence. Then he took a biscuit, reeled in a graceful circle up to Mr. Hutchins and gripped his hand.

"I'm a man of very few words," he said, nodding confidentially, "but I like *you*. Stick to it; it's all ri'. They can't resurrect him. Let 'em try. Let 'em do their worst. I know all about that pipe. My work. Don't be afraid. Perfectly all ri'. *Verb. sap.*"

Mr. Hicks wrung Bill's hand again, blew a kiss to Susie and tight-roped very carefully out of the room.

The exhausted mate staggered to the sofa and lay there, mopping the sweat from his brow.

"My 'ead's aching 'orribly," he said with a cowed glance at his wife. "They can't all be balmy, so I s'pose it's me. I didn't understand a word they said to me. Who are they? What do they want? Who were the old geesers?"

"They're great men of science, Bill, and they wanted to have a look at you."

"Why, what's the matter with me? Seemed to me they was looking at my 'ead, and I didn't half like it neither. Who called them in?"

"They thought you was an unusual specimen, Bill. They thought you 'ad a phantasm."

"Why, what d'you mean, Susie?"

She handed him the newspaper cutting. There was a silence, a long silence.

"It's a fair knock-out!" said Bill at last sulkily.

"Yes," said Susie rather wistfully. "I suppose it was me that had the phantasm."

"It would never 'ave 'appened but for that Miss Perkins," said Bill. Then a somewhat puzzling question occurred to him: "Why don't you believe in these 'ere phantasms now, Susie? You must have believed in them this morning or you wouldn't have brought them old baboons down on me."

"Ah," said Susie, rubbing her nose gently against his cheek, "you been eating onions, Bill."

Mr. Hutchins gave a start and scrutinized his wife's innocent face. Her eyes were shining like those in the picture on their bedroom wall—"The Soul's Awakening"—the untroubled eyes of an angel.

"I suppose," she said, "it seemed kind of pleasant

to have a lady from Lunnon dropping in just as if she was a friend, so I made believe to myself that I believed in it. But we don't want them coming here any more. We can drop them gradual like."

"I don't see why I should 'ave to crawl on my stummick telling 'em what I said was——"

"All lies, dear? No. You needn't do that. Just tell 'em you've made your statement and you've nothing to add to it. They like to hear that. Gives it a kind of Bank of England touch. It won't do 'em any harm if they want to believe it. As Miss Perkins said herself, they 'aven't any imaginations."

On the sea-front at Tarrytown there is now a cozy little tobacconist's shop known as The Hutch. There you may still obtain an excellent briar pipe for one shilling and sixpence. At the door there is a rack of newspapers, illustrated magazines, penny dreadfuls and the latest pink novelettes of the *Forget-Me-Not* series. In the window there are bowls of a wonderful mixture called Hutchins' Own. It is made by opening tins of somebody else's mixture, adding a little Latakia and charging a little extra.

In the evening the latest novelettes may be read by the proprietor's wife in the back parlor. The small boy reads Deadwood Dicks, most delicious of penny dreadfuls in yellow and red since the days of the broad-sheet ballad. The proprietor himself reads detective stories in the most widely circulated magazines. There is a family compact that all this reading shall take place without detriment to the commercial value of the stock. The result, of course, is that the proprietor and his wife can make

intelligent recommendations to readers hesitating in the doorways of romance, old ladies fingering the title-page, or young maidens glancing at the conclusion. Thus we see how old saws may be refuted, how pleasure may come before business with benefits to all concerned, and how it is quite possible both to eat your cake and still be able to make a profit on it.

To this epitome of heaven, on a certain afternoon, six months after the lamentable discovery at the reservoir, came the merely terrestrial postman. He delivered a square package addressed to Mr. and Mrs. William Hutchins. It was Susie's turn to play at keeping shop, so of course she cut the string and had the first look at the contents—a fat green journal entitled *Review of the Royal Institute of Spiritualistic Research*. She turned the pages curiously. A familiar name caught her eye.

"Bill!" she cried. "Bill, here's your phantasm! Oh, look, Bill, here's your phantasm! They've printed it!"

Bright-eyed, breathless, bubbling with laughter, she dashed into the back parlor and spread the *Review* on the red tablecloth before her husband. They read it aloud together.

The following specimen sentences are all that any philosopher will require to convince him once more that the lightest of fiction is usually truer than the heaviest of facts:

"A well-authenticated case of a phantasm of the dead is reported by four members of the Society who personally investigated it. A sailor named William Hutchins told his wife, on April the sixth, that he had met the captain of his boat on the previous

evening, and that they had a long talk together. The captain told him that a new captain would be required ere long, and made a grim joke about drowning in drinking-water. . . .

"The very next morning Mrs. Hutchins discovered from the newspaper that, at the exact hour of this apparition, Captain Morgan had been drowned in the reservoir at Tarrytown. . . .

"She reported the case at once to Miss Perkins, who, by great good fortune, was staying at a neighboring house with several of our most eminent members, including Sir Joshua Boodle, the distinguished bimetallist. They were able to visit Mr. Hutchins and cross-examine him immediately, before the news of the death had reached him. Sir Joshua Boodle states that there was not the slightest doubt of Mr. Hutchins' complete ignorance of the captain's death. Some very remarkable results were obtained: (a) Mr. Hutchins mentioned a joke about 'red herrings' that the captain was actually heard to make a moment before his death; (b) Mr. Hutchins mentioned a plumber, whose profession—in a sense—was responsible for the death; (c) Mr. Hutchins used the pet name of Morgan's widow, although at the time he did not know that the captain had ever been married. It was an unusual name: 'Aunt Jemima.' "

Here followed an elaborate full-dress version of the whole story as it appeared to the leading intellects of the age. All the *significant* points were properly *stressed*, and "*stress*," as Miss Perkins would say, "is *so* important, don't you think?"

Finally Sir Joshua Boodle, the eminent bimetalist, in a note to the editor, stated that if this ma-

terial were regarded as the climax of a great mass of cumulative evidence, it was practically conclusive. "But," he says, "I should be content to rest our case for the appearance of phantasms of the dead, for the immortality of the soul and for the restoration of faith to mankind on the facts provided, consciously, unconsciously and subconsciously, by that simple British sailor, Mr. William Hutchins, mate of the *Susanna*."

"Goo' lor' l'" said Bill.

"Ain't it *awful*?" said Susie.

V

THE IMMORTAL

THERE was no shelter in sight when the storm overtook me on the bare Sussex downs. The southwest wind that wrecked the Armada was rushing up from the Channel with tall shadowy armies of rain. In a few minutes their stalking phantoms had crossed a dozen gray crests and valleys and were striding round me and over me. Steel-gray skeleton armies, rank after rank, with streaming clouds like tattered flags above them, and whips of sleet in their hands that slashed you across the eyes if you turned to face them, they drove me forward between the whistling gorse bushes and stony stubble.

I was drenched from head to foot, and I had lost all sense of direction when the storm drove me on to the white chalk path that led, as I guessed, to Saltwood Hollow. It was one of the last places in this world that I wished to visit, and one of the most desolate in all that countryside. The decayed old house, hidden down there among its untended trees, living and dead, was a byword for dreariness; and its only occupant, Sir Walter Rickman, was known among the country people as "the mad baronet." He lived there quite alone, with no servant; and for more than a quarter of a century no one had been admitted to the house. He allowed a dairy-

man in the nearest village to make some use of his tumbledown farm buildings and kitchen garden, in return for which he was supplied with enough dairy and garden produce for his own needs. A workman who had once been called in to mend a roof had divulged for the edification of the curious that for years past the rain had been allowed to do what it pleased to the upper stories, though basins and tin pans and even a bathtub had been arranged on the top floor to save the rooms below.

Once or twice, in lonely walks among the downs, I had met this singular personage, rambling along with uncertain footsteps and an uncanny glint in his eye. Nothing could have been farther from my purpose than to intrude upon his household mysteries, even if they had been less tragic than rumor supposed. But the storm had apparently settled down for a regular witches' sabbath. I knew that I was at least six miles from any other house, even if I could be sure of my course across that open country; and I thought that I could probably find shelter in one of Sir Walter's rickety outbuildings.

It was the only place for miles around where trees grew; and, somehow or other, as I went down into that thickly wooded hollow, the strangeness of the fact that trees were blackening the sky above me struck a queer chill into my blood. They had been allowed to grow quite wild, and there were big dead boughs across the grass-grown track that had once been a drive. It looked like the last few acres of a virgin forest.

All the circumstances were as absurdly melodramatic as only Nature herself could make them.

There was a dull mutter of thunder in the distance. Beyond two dilapidated farm buildings a flicker of lightning burnished a duck-pond to a livid green as I went somewhat furtively between the decayed gateposts. Another flicker showed me the house itself—an appalling ghost of a place, exceedingly tall and ugly. It would have been wickedly ugly if its gray-white face had not been masked a little by the elms that laid their boughs across the blank stare of its windows, and the long weather-stains that looked as if it had been weeping until it could weep no more. “Long tears upon men’s faces, waxen white—for extreme sad delight.”

The lines came into my mind as I approached. But in spite of the storm, the old house was not weeping now. It stood up sternly, like a superhuman spirit that has been tortured till its very pain gives it power to defy and pronounce judgment upon the unjust gods. It seemed to be taller than the tallest elms around it; almost taller than the sky.

The place exercised a strange fascination upon me; and abandoning my first thought of an out-building, I determined to try for shelter, perhaps even a chance of drying myself at a fire, within the house itself. If nobody had ever been admitted in living memory, perhaps this was because nobody in the neighborhood had ever been in a predicament bad enough to make him try.

There was, in any case, a cumbrous bell-pull at the side of the door. I tugged at it, and heard the unmistakable mellow clang of a Sussex sheep-bell within. Sir Walter was evidently a man of ideas. In a moment or two I heard the shuffle of slippered

feet approaching. Heavy bars were lifted, and the door opened, showing a tall, gaunt figure in a tattered blue dressing-gown. He lifted a guttering candle level with my face, peered intently at me for a moment; then, before I could speak, he said:

"I wondered how long it would be before you discovered me. Come in. I may give you what you want, or I may not. But there'll be no harm in talking it over."

This greeting from a perfect stranger hardly reassured me as to his sanity, but the conventionalities I was preparing to utter vanished like smoke; and, as I followed him through his gloomy hall, the somewhat incoherent explanations and thanks which I directed towards the back of his head made me feel as if he were at least on surer ground than myself. I caught a glimpse of two glorious old Tudor chairs. Then he led me into a room, an immense room it seemed in the semi-darkness, lighted only by a wood fire on the open hearth, and a single candle. This he now put back in a massive silver candlestick on an oak side table, where he had evidently been supping on bread and cheese and an apple.

He took me by the sleeve and deposited me in the corner of an oak settle, paying no more attention to my attempts at explanation than he had paid to the patter of the rain in the hall. He announced simply that he was going to make some hot rum-punch, with a dash of lemon in it—which he did most excellently, in a hammered silver bowl that looked as if it had come out of an old Spanish treasure-ship. When he spoke, it was with the peculiar freedom of inflection that one always observes in men who have es-

caped the common grooves of custom; and also he had that curious intimacy of the man who is much alone. He talked to me as if he were talking to himself, sometimes taking it for granted that I knew trivial things concerning himself. I realized afterwards that I had come upon him at a decisive moment in his life; and it was partly this, I suppose, that made him greet me as if he had been expecting me, as if it were written in his diary that I was to visit him and hear what he had to say for himself before the end.

Before long I found that I was listening to nothing less than his life-story. He talked as if now, after a third of a century, the disburdening of his mind was a necessary preliminary to some great and perilous adventure from which he might never return,

"A good many years ago," he said, "I was less contented than I am now. I suppose you wouldn't think it, but I had energy enough then, perhaps credulity enough, to join in one of those mad rushes to the gold-fields of the far West.

"Two other men—I'd met them at Cambridge—went out with me. There they are."

He lifted a candle to two faded photographs.

"Harris, the fat chap with the codfish eye, was a pretty cold-blooded specimen. He was born in British Columbia, and after taking his degree, he had just begun to wait for briefs in London. He wanted to make money quickly in order to go into politics and I suppose—make a great place for himself. The other man, Burke, with the haggard face, was about the same age, though he looks forty, doesn't

he? He was a dissipated young devil. He had been sent down from Cambridge, and his family had promised him his passage-money and a small allowance if he would emigrate. I liked him better than Harris; he was more human. But he was hardly a friend of mine at college. The only link between us was that we'd been up together and met at breakfast in somebody's rooms. He was really the moving spirit in our adventure, and he had grit, but he had no scruples of any sort.

"I had been included in the enterprise, I suppose, chiefly because they wanted a little spare capital. At any rate, we formed ourselves into a kind of company. Harris contributed legal acumen and a certain knowledge of the country to which we were going. Burke contributed his physical energy—he was a glutton for muscular exercise, and something of a boxer. My own contribution was about four hundred pounds toward expenses, and what Harris used to call the 'sunshine of my presence.' It was to be a short, sharp campaign, win or lose. For my own part, I had been married only about a year, and I was not anxious to break up my hearthstone——"

He paused and held the candle up to another photograph, the faded picture of an unusually sly-looking young woman, beautiful enough in a feline fashion to be at least one of the reasons why the rain was now coming through the roof of this uncanny house and the wind wailing along the windows like a lost spirit.

"However, my wife was tremendously enthusiastic over the gorgeous prospect that Harris and Burke

opened up. I remember, as if it were yesterday, how we all sat here in front of this fire. The place was not so dilapidated then; but she was young, and one could hardly wonder at her desire for gayety. She wanted to live in London; and, when Harris had finished describing his project, she clapped her hands and danced, just there on that tattered old rug. Before the evening was over, she began to talk about furnishing a house in Berkeley Square. I believe, at the time, she looked on Harris and Burke as my most devoted friends, offering me the chance of my life. At any rate she urged me to take it and leave her. Six months, even a year if necessary, would soon pass. At the worst we could go on more or less as before when I came back to her; and she made me feel horribly small-minded and stick-in-the-mud over my ideas of farming my own property.

"I'll spare you the history of our gold-hunt in the West. It was the most hopeless failure; and, though Burke set his teeth and kept us going long after we others had lost heart, even he succumbed at last and took to gambling as a preferable way of growing rich quickly. Of course, he was right; it *was* preferable. We were all rich for exactly three weeks. Then everything went, except our last bottle of whisky and the clothes on our backs.

"We set out to tramp south to San Diego, where Harris had some fairly well-to-do relations on a fruit-ranch. He thought they might help Burke to a job and ourselves to a passage home. He was mad for London, and afraid to go near his people in British Columbia, for fear that they would keep

him tethered to some job where he couldn't hear the hansom cabs jingling along Piccadilly.

"On the whole, that long penniless tramp south was the only pleasant period of our travels. We fared well by robbing an occasional fruit-orchard, or doing an odd job or two on a ranch. One evening just as it was growing dusk, we were walking along the coast road. I remember noticing that somebody had been dropping little clusters of black grapes on the pearl-gray sands beside the road, just as trippers drop gooseberry skins on Brighton beach. But the only living things in sight were some regiments of pelicans at the water's edge. We were thinking of turning in among the sage-brush for the night, when we heard somebody groaning amongst the sand hills. We hunted about and found a man lying there, a strange creature, a sort of Mexican cross-breed. But there was something about him that startled us.

"I can't explain it, but it was the sort of feeling one would expect if we had found a stranded merman. He lay there panting, as if he were at the point of death; and in that mysterious Pacific sunset, his old blue dungarees, his gold earrings and his long black hair seemed to be shot through with fading colors. He made me think of the dolphin in *Childe Harold*. The queerest part of it was that, though he looked a youngish man when we first came upon him, he seemed to be getting older under our very eyes. His face began to crawl with wrinkles. Suffering might have a similar effect, but there was something different about this. Even his hair seemed to be taking a gray tinge that one

could not attribute to the changes of the evening light.

"Harris and Burke were not imaginative beings, and they were obviously bewildered, even a little awestruck. I heard Burke, with his red, whisky-fied face, muttering something about being in at the death of 'The Ancient Mariner.'

"We set a flask to the lips of the old man, for that is what he really appeared to be then, and succeeded in reviving him. He seized Harris by the arm and cried in a shrill voice like the wail of a frightened sea-bird: 'Help me! Help me, as you hope for mercy, and I will give you everything I possess, everything! See, here is money!' And he lugged out a leather bag from a hip-pocket in his dungarees, and poured at least a couple of hundred gold coins on the sand before us.

" 'There is more, plenty more, where that came from,' he cried. 'Only help me. Do as I tell you, and you shall have it all.'

"His anxiety was so pitiful, his promises were so emphatic, and his gold so weighty, that Harris and Burke were quite ready to join me in my assurances that we would do anything in our power to help him. The old man was so encouraged by this that he struggled to his feet scattering the gold in all directions. He gripped Harris and Burke by the arms and gasped: 'Come, then, quickly. It lies over the hills yonder! In a little valley! I will show you the way if you will support me.'

"They obeyed him eagerly enough, thinking only of their own reward, and not hazarding a guess at the cause of the old man's anxiety. Harris was

practical enough to ask me over his shoulder to pick up the scattered coins.

“Take charge of them for the party, Rickman,” he said, ‘like a good honest capitalist.’

“It took us the better part of a night to climb that hill-trail through the gray-green sage-brush; but feeble as the old man was physically, his mind was on fire. It seemed almost as if he had taken possession of our bodies to execute a purpose of his own spirit. Occasionally we tried to question him and discover what his urgent journey might mean; but his answers were like the delirious talk of a fever, and we could make nothing of them. Apparently he had smashed and abandoned the car in which he had set out that morning and he had tried to continue on foot along the deserted coast, until he was exhausted. He babbled of a great secret that had been given to himself and another man named Brisbane, three hundred years ago, by an Indian medicine-man, and how he must find the other man or die, but if he found the other man, he would live for another three hundred years. He talked of a strange cactus plant, far rarer than the century-plant, for there was only one now in existence, since he had lost the plant which would have renewed his own supply of the precious life-essence. It flowered only once every three hundred years. He said that something he called ‘mescal’ was made from it, and it was youth and life everlasting to the blood; but there was only enough for two, and he trusted that the other man would be bound to let him have his share; and, as we hoped for mercy,

let us make haste, or he would die within sight of his own immortality.

"He said all this to us in the strangest broken jargon that you can imagine; and, if it had not been for the gold coins jingling in my pockets, I believe Burke and Harris would have left him as a hopeless lunatic. But there was obviously something more, some very real meaning behind his ravings. Occasionally, one of his cries would make my own brain dance to his fantastic pipings. His tale, on the face of it, was absurd; but I could not help remembering the weird change that had come over him in the fading evening light, and wondering whether we were really making our way towards an unearthly secret. Lines of poetry crept into my mind. Poetry sometimes hits on strange truths in advance even of science:

" 'The end of day and beginning of night,
Make the apple holy and bright,
Round and full, bright and blest,
All good things are in the West.
The Golden Apple, the hallowed fruit,
Guard it well, guard it warily,
Watch it warily,
Standing about the charmed root.'

"Thoughts like these were in my mind, thoughts with no real application to the matter in hand; and yet in some strange way I felt that the old man in his broken speech was trying to utter something very like them.

"The day was breaking when we came upon a little cultivated hollow among those gray-green

desert hills. The old man gave an inarticulate cry and pointed to a low white bungalow, shining like a temple of the dawn through peach-blossom and palmettos. A place as miraculous in its isolated beauty as a mirage in mid-Sahara! The next moment our strange companion had shaken himself free from our support, upon which he had been leaning heavily for hours, and was tumbling forward in a shaky jog-trot. The sight of that oasis seemed to renew his vigor, and we had to bestir ourselves to keep at his heels.

"He stopped like a questing hound when he came to the peach-trees; and we all stopped and stared at the place. The silence, the beauty of it, the sense of dawn and dew brooding over it—I can't describe them, but it was the kind of home Keats would have chosen for his immortal lovers.

"The old man stole forward over the long black shadows of the trees. We others, odd intruders from an alien world, followed him. It was all so still that it seemed hardly possible for anyone to be breathing in that quiet bungalow. I could hear a clock ticking within.

"Whatever our guide might be seeking, there was no doubt about his dreadful anxiety. It worked upon all our nerves, I think, and screwed them up to an intensity so abnormal that it may have contributed to the disasters that followed.

"We had reached an open space about fifty yards to the rear of the house when the old man stopped with a gasp before a small circular inclosure thickly hedged to a height of eight feet. The hedge was reinforced by a fence of barbed wire; and over it

one could see the top of what I supposed at first to be a grotesque Oriental idol of green jade. Drawing nearer, I saw that it was a living thing, a fantastic cactus of a kind quite unknown to me.

"The effect of it on the old man was like the sight of opium to an addict who has been forcibly withheld from it. He shook from head to foot; and before we knew what he would be about, he had dropped on his knees, whipped out a long knife and was cutting away at the barbed wire like a maniac, whimpering horribly all the while.

"We should have taken him to be as crazy as perhaps you think myself, if it had not been for that indescribable monstrosity within the fence, and the hundred and one indescribable things that had happened during the last twelve hours. It was like getting a glimpse of things behind the veil—I can't explain it better than that; and it held us there like a spell. The old man took a very short time to cut himself an opening through the barbed wire and the hedge. He wriggled through it with the eager agility of a monkey. But this ended the privacy of our visit. He had no sooner disappeared than we heard a snarling within the inclosure, as if he had roused Cerberus himself. There was one shrill screech for help from the old man. Burke whipped his revolver out, and while Harris and I were scrambling through the opening we heard him fire twice in quick succession within. We had little time to conjecture what kind of sleepers in that quiet bungalow would be roused to confront us in a minute or two.

"The scene, inside that fantastic inclosure, was a

strange one. The old man, with his throat badly lacerated, was lying across Burke's arm. At his feet a black mastiff, an enormous creature, was still twitching in death. It is queer what minute things sometimes impress themselves firmly upon one's memory. I can still see vividly the little iridescent bubbles in the lather of blood and foam about the dead beast's muzzle. Over them that horrible cactus—for horrible it seemed to me even then—rose like the enigmatic symbol of some vile religion. I had only a fleeting glimpse of it, for we were in that accursed place only a few seconds. It gave me the general impression of a great serpent of green jade, as thick as a man's thigh, coiled around an agonized naked body, a yellowish ivory trunk ringed like bamboo. The green coils were mailed with scales of prickly leaf, and mottled with dark iridescences. I could not tell whether they were two growths, parasite and victim, or whether they were a fantastic unity; but they might well have served as a model to a modern impressionist for a picture of the temptation of Eve.

"We were not more than a quarter of a minute in getting the old man out into the open; but, as we stumbled up to the orchard, carrying him between us, an ironical voice called out 'good morning!' from the thick of the trees; and a moment later a tall man in pajamas came out between two palmettos and stood covering us with a revolver.

" 'A beautiful morning, isn't it?' he said. 'But I don't allow shooting on this property. What have you been doing to that poor old man?'

" 'Is your name Brisbane?' asked Harris.

" 'It is,' said the stranger. 'And I happen to be the owner of this property.'

" 'Well, all I know is that your dog has just killed a friend of yours,' said Burke, who was a great believer in the principle that attack is the best defense.

" 'And you can't do this kind of thing with impunity, you know,' said Harris with an absurdly legal air.

" 'I felt that our position was a little weak and said nothing.

" 'Dead, is he?' said Brisbane, speaking as I thought with a curiously artificial accent and manner. 'Dead on the very edge of fortune, just as he had made that hole in the barbed wire. Oh, surely not! That would be too like the irony of the gods. Carry him into the house, and we will see what can be done for him. I have some skill as a surgeon.'

" 'We lifted the limp body, all three of us, and carried it into the bungalow. Brisbane closed the door behind us, and we laid the old man on a couch in a corner of a large living-room paneled with a slightly aromatic wood. Brisbane knelt by the couch; and as he looked at the old man's face, I thought that he gave a slight start of recognition. Burke and Harris noticed it too. They exchanged glances; and from that moment their attitude of challenge became more confident, while Brisbane appeared to be more and more on the defensive.

" 'You had better leave the old man in my hands,' he said. 'He is not dead, and I think we can pull him round. In the meantime your own wants must

be attended to—Gen! Iso! he called, and two Japanese menservants in short white coats came slip-slopping through the door with the eagerness of jinn at the call of a magician.

“He gave them some orders in Japanese, and then asked us to follow them into an adjacent room, where they would give us breakfast.

“It was the best breakfast we had eaten for many a day. I remember even now the flavor of that grapefruit, the delicious coffee, waffles and fried chicken that followed.

“We were left entirely to ourselves for the rest of the day. The Japs looked after us excellently, gave us lunch and dinner, and brought us occasional favorable news from Brisbane about the progress of his patient; but we saw nothing of Brisbane himself till after dinner that evening, when he joined us on the porch outside the dining-room.

“‘It is good to meet someone from the old country again, even if our first encounters were perilous,’ he said with that oddity of phrase—indefinably slight—which I had noticed before.

“He stretched himself lazily in a long rocking-chair, lighted a cigar, and added: ‘I have been exiled from England for a long, long time.’ But there was something more than the ordinary meaning in his last phrase, and it annoyed me like a deliberately obliterated phrase in a letter. It gave me the sense of one looking backward over many generations, and yet his appearance was that of a man in the prime of life. His clear skin, abundant hair and classic features made me think of some of the immortally youthful characters of antiquity. I could have imag-

ined him among the Argonauts, the real Argonauts, I mean, not the 'forty-niners. From time to time he used—you might almost say he slipped into—words that puzzled and tantalized me. Some of them are to be found in the glossaries of Elizabethan literature; but he used them in a way that I could not explain entirely by the fine collection of Elizabethan plays that I had noticed on his bookshelves. There was something uncanny in the atmosphere of the whole place. Even the matter-of-fact Burke was aware of it, and shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"I hardly know why it had not occurred to us before, but we none of us realized that Brisbane was married, till in one of the pauses of our conversation we heard the voice of a woman singing in an upper room to the accompaniment of a *samisen*. It was the most curious music I had ever heard, simple as the melodies of the South Sea Islanders, and yet not at all primitive, and certainly not 'modern' in the usual sense. It had generations of development behind it. It was almost mystical in feeling. I was quite unable to place it. There was happiness and sunlight in it, unfailing sunlight. It was tender, emotional; and yet, if I had to characterize it in a single phrase, I think it might be called non-human. It was something aloof from the life of mankind as we know it, and the aloofness was too strange to be explained altogether by the isolation of the musician in this lonely valley of the West. Some of the words—they have haunted me ever since—I will give you later, and perhaps they will help to suggest what I felt at the time.

"About half-past nine that evening we heard the

wounded man raising his voice querulously in the adjoining room, and a Japanese voice excitedly expostulating. Brisbane rose and left us; and in a moment or two we heard—we could not help hearing through those thin walls—perhaps the weirdest conversation that has ever taken place, a conversation that either proved the old man's complete sanity or else the insanity of Brisbane also. The old man was pleading for something that would restore him to life and strength; and Brisbane, not harshly, but with the inflexibility of the Angel of Death, was refusing it.

" 'There is enough for two,' we heard the old man cry.

" 'There are already two to share it,' Brisbane replied. 'I am married.'

" 'It is fair that you should take what is yours; but what right has this woman to rob me of my share? In a few days I, rich with the experience of three hundred years, shall be dead if you withhold it from me. She has all her life before her. What more can she want?' The voice of the pleader rose crazily and jerkily, as if he were being held down by force. It was the reply of Brisbane that froze us into attention, for we had no doubt of his sanity, and we sat there staring at one another as if we were listening to a conversation of ghosts.

" 'It seems to me that Mr. Brisbane has been dealing himself all the aces,' muttered Burke. 'We ought to get to the bottom of this.'

"I nodded my assent, saying something about our being partly responsible for the old man.

"Harris looked at me impatiently, and mumbled

something about looking after our own rights. I didn't quite see what our rights could be; but Burke was evidently of the same mind, and they shook hands on it. From this moment I felt that I had become an outsider in their councils. Probably they had got at the truth of the matter more completely than I had, for they had both done a good deal of deliberate eavesdropping, while I had only caught accidental phrases. There was some ugly significance in their glances even then; but though I was vaguely uneasy, I had no suspicion yet of the hell-broth that was brewing in their minds. We heard Brisbane's footsteps approaching, and Burke whispered hurriedly to Harris: 'Make him think that you know everything and you'll get at it.'

"As our host entered the room, Burke squared up to him like a prize-fighter. 'Mr. Brisbane,' he said, 'we all hope you are going to do the fair thing by our friend.'

"'I believe that I am probably doing him the greatest service in my power,' Brisbane replied with a sincerity that puzzled me. One felt that he had something on his conscience and yet his quiet voice and grave expression, the superiority of his mental stature, made the physical prowess of Burke appear extraordinarily inadequate. 'I am sorry for him, profoundly sorry for him,' he continued, 'and I suppose it illustrates the fundamental necessity of selfishness in all human affairs. Of course you are intelligent enough to have gathered—even from his somewhat incoherent remarks—the very extraordinary thing that has brought disaster or happiness, I really don't know which, upon two human beings

for the last three hundred years. You don't know all the details, and I am not going to enlighten you further than to advise you, if ever you discover a means of unduly prolonging your lives, to make very sure of what you really want before you use it.

"It was a very long time ago when our friend in there and myself received the same warning from the old Mexican Indian who introduced us to it. The sap of a certain cactus that comes to fruit only once in three hundred years may give a like longevity to the tissues of the human body; but how that cup of "mescal" may affect the soul it is impossible to tell. Perhaps that is why the present question perplexes us so much. What are we to do when two persons have secured a certain possession for themselves which cannot be made to serve the needs of more? You get right down there to the fundamental conflict between selfishness and altruism. The possession can be relinquished altogether, of course, to two other persons; but they, in turn, will either have to be selfish, or abdicate utterly. Others have discovered by accident that I possess this secret; in every case it has developed what was evil in their natures, with the exception of one person, the woman I have married. You would be amazed at the tragicomic parade of human passions, greed, cowardice and hypocrisy that have passed through this little acre during what would seem to you a long period of time, though it has all gone by for myself like a dream. I have had a minister of religion here, a man who had preached twice a week for twenty years, upon the immortality of the soul and the glorious life of the world to come; and he went

down on his knees to me on that veranda for a draught of the cup that would give him continuance of life on the earth that he pretended to despise.

“ ‘For my own part, though perhaps you will not believe it, I have a curious envy, sometimes, of those who can be awakened from this dream that we call life by the beneficent Angel of Death. You will say that this is like fabulously rich men envying the penniless. Perhaps it is—a fabulously rich and lonely man envying the multitudes of penniless lovers. It is illuminating in many ways to be a stationary spectator of that vast, moving human procession, to see generation after generation grow old and die, to know that there is not a soul alive whom you talked with in your boyhood. The procession flows more and more quickly as one grows used to it. You are more and more sure that there must be an answer to the eternal question: whither and to what end? But you yourself, by your own choice, are condemned never to learn it.’

“It was very late when Brisbane led us to our rooms and bade us good-night. He had led the conversation on to many other topics, but underlying it all there had been for me, like an undertone of music, the profoundly moving burden of his earlier discourse. It had little effect upon Burke and Harris—and none of the kind that Brisbane intended. I saw the lawyer glancing furtively at Burke from time to time, and it was obvious from the expression of the latter that his thoughts were moving on a very practical plane. The meanness and ugliness of those thoughts were as apparent as frogs in a shallow pool.

"I was uneasy that night, for I felt sure that my companions had some diabolical conspiracy on hand. I will do them the justice to say that they were hardly big enough to be tempted by the ideas that had brought Brisbane into his peculiar position. I imagine, from one or two whispers that passed between them, that Harris and Burke were thinking of very little more than the huge material tribute they might levy on some old and sickly millionaire, if they possessed the precious liquor. Certainly their whispers boded no good to Brisbane and his wife. I suppose they guessed that I might be troublesome if they confided in me, and I heard Harris go into Burke's room after Brisbane had left us. They were whispering there together long after I turned in.

"I suppose it was a little after two o'clock in the morning when I woke out of a broken slumber, went to the window and looked out over that strange dusky garden of the Hesperides. My home-keeping mind was fascinated by the magic of its thousand and one little differences from the stillness of our summer nights in Sussex. I watched the fireflies gliding like elves with torches between the dark columns of the eucalyptus trees. (Has it ever occurred to you that those elfin torches were perhaps the origin of the first legends of the Little Folk?) The whole countryside seemed to be alive and purring with tree-toads and crickets, and to a stranger like myself the effect was one of vast and unfathomable eeriness.

"My reverie was ended by the creak of a door below. Two dark crouching figures emerged, ran

stealthily toward the fenced inclosure and knelt. I heard a faint sawing sound as if they were trying to cut the barbed wire; and, before I had realized what was happening, I saw Gen, the Japanese—I recognized him by his short white coat—marching like a little military ghost toward them. He was within a few yards of them before he spoke. A short, sharp ejaculation was all that reached me, and the two blackguards were on him like tigers. I saw the flash of a knife in the moonlight, and it was all over. They tumbled the faithful little sentry out of the way like a sack of apples; and, after listening for a moment, they turned to their work again with feverish haste. Incidentally, as I discovered later, they could have gained nothing there. They had been misled by their eavesdroppings. The mescal was already made, and locked up in the house. But they would stick at nothing now.

"There was only one thing for me to do. The two men had been my companions; but I had not yet committed myself to theft and murder. I picked up my revolver and went as quickly as possible to rouse my host.

" 'I knew that you were all right,' he whispered as we went downstairs, 'but one is always apt to overlook the weaker links in the chain.'

"The two others were on their feet and facing us as soon as we had opened the door. I saw the moonlight glitter on their revolvers. Burke's voice rang out, ordering us to put up our hands; and without any parley, Brisbane fired. I think he got Burke in the left shoulder, but it was not enough to prevent both of the scoundrels letting fly at us.

They must have shot wildly, for it sounded as if they had smashed all the windows in the house. Brisbane and I fired together. Burke fell back against the barbed wire and collapsed, tearing at his chest; and I got a bullet in my right arm which made me drop my revolver—it fell behind me inside the house. Harris fired again, and as Brisbane twisted round towards me and caught at me for support, I saw that one side of his face was dark with blood.

“I dragged Brisbane back into the house with me, groped for my weapon and retrieved it. But Harris came running like a horrible white-faced ferret straight towards us, and it was obviously his intention to make sure of finishing us off at close quarters. I swung up my pistol, pulled the trigger—and the hammer snapped on a faulty cartridge. Crouching inside the doorway, he raised his revolver and fired, and at the same moment I made a dive at him and collared him with my sound arm. I was a stronger man than Harris, and by sheer weight I succeeded in throwing him, gripped his right wrist and held it behind his back; but, as we twisted over together on the floor, I could feel that he was slowly wrenching his hand free to use his revolver. It was a bestial struggle, and since I had only one hand for gripping purposes, when I was not trying to grind the life out of him with a knee in the hollow of his ribs, I was trying to hold on to him by my teeth in his shoulder and throat.

“But he got the better of me at last, and he would have finished me if he had not chosen to kneel gloating over me as I lay there exhausted. He pressed the muzzle of his revolver against my eyes, first one,

then the other. I can feel the cold ring of it now, pressing softly on my eyelids.

“‘Where will you have it?’ he said. He went on—almost chanting—in a kind of cruel ecstasy. ‘The luck has come to Doggy Harris after all, you see! Somebody was bound to be killed when the whole damned world was the prize and only one man could win it. And I’ve won it! Doggy Harris has won it—youth and wealth and champagne suppers, and the lust of the flesh and the pride of the eye, for ever and for ever, in a Piccadilly flat! Because now that there’s nobody to share it, I can have the life as well as the money. Never to grow old, never to die, as I regret to inform you that you, my dear Sir Walter, must now prepare to do.’

“He raised his hand to blow my head to pieces. It was as near as that, when I was deafened by the explosion of a rifle in the hallway—and Harris dropped dead across my knees.

“It was Mrs. Brisbane, of course, who had saved me; and, when I got to my feet, I saw her moaning like a wounded bird over the dead body of her husband.

“I went over to her; and, as she rose to meet me, I thought I had never seen a more beautiful human being, even in her desolation. If ever a woman was made for immortality, it was this one. She rose there like a more youthful Niobe, frozen with grief; and by some strange inhibition, even when she was able to speak, she spoke of another death that hardly concerned her. ‘The old man in the house is lying dead,’ she whispered, ‘after he had traveled so many leagues in search of life.’ Then she

laughed, not hysterically, but with a cold bitterness that was terrible to hear, and stood looking down at Brisbane's face.

"It was not like ordinary grief, the way she took it. Even in the first pang of their separation there was something like relief too, that Nature had unlocked the prison of their immortality and that it was now possible for both of them to share the common fate and attain whatever was to be attained beyond this life. Looking back, I can see now that she hoped to follow him quickly.

"I helped her to carry Brisbane's body into another room. She washed and dressed my own wound, which was not serious; and though I was anxious to help her in any possible way, she urged me so earnestly to leave her to her own devices and go at once, that I felt there was nothing to do but obey.

" 'There is nothing you can do for me now,' she said, 'and it will save us both a world of trouble if all this is attributed to a gang of robbers. I am grateful to you for doing your best to help me and for trying to save my husband.' Then she added abruptly: 'Are you married?' I nodded, and she continued: 'Perhaps, then, the gift for which so many people have died, and the power to continue your happiness indefinitely, without taking the plunge into the dark which all others have to take, may be of use to you. I valued it once; but now I don't know whether it would be a curse or a blessing to you. It has lost its value for me completely; and I may be giving you a most unhappy gift. If

you do not desire it, I shall put it out of the power of anyone else to inherit it.'

"While she was speaking, she unlocked a cupboard, took out a leather-covered flask and offered it to me.

" 'This contains the "mescal" which, as you have heard, will suffice for two. Take it,' she said, 'but do not be in a hurry to decide. It will never lose its virtue. You can keep it till you are quite sure of your own heart. With it you can take some of the seeds of the cactus and plant them where you please, so that you will be able to renew the curse or the blessing when the appointed number of years has passed.'

"I hesitated. The thought that I could bring the gift of undying youth and love to the woman who was waiting for me at home was difficult to put aside; yet I did hesitate for a moment.

" 'Later on,' I said, 'you may wish that you had not given it to me.'

" 'If you knew how I hate it!' she cried. 'And how soon I shall join him! Do you not see that while it may keep you and yours together, it can only separate me and mine? Take it, for God's sake, and go; for if you leave it, I shall only pour it out into the desert sand. Oh, wait, wait a moment; and I will show you that I mean what I say.'

"She darted away from me into another room; but I was not alive to the full meaning of her words. If I had delayed a moment more in following her, I should have been too late; for, as it was, I was only just in time to snatch the revolver from her hand.

"I had left that dreadful hollow among the hills far behind me before noon that day; and, there on the Pacific coast, I made my own mad decision and drank my own share of the mescal. I believe there was some dreadful fascination about the thing that impelled me to do it, like the strange vertigo that has led men to leap into Niagara or over the brink of the Grand Cañon.

"After some vicissitudes, with which I will not worry you, I made my way to New York and succeeded in getting a passage home. I watched the newspapers, but never saw any reference to that tragedy in the West. It is possible that it was not discovered till long afterwards, for there was no lonelier spot to be found in California.

"When I arrived here, I was half crazy with eagerness to see my wife and tell her that, though I was not yet rich, I had brought her a gift for which innumerable women would have sold their souls, since it meant, not only life, but unaging beauty also. The house was empty; there was no one in the neighborhood who could or would tell me where my wife had gone. Eventually I discovered that she was somewhere in London with another man, and that I too was endowed with a life infinitely more hopeless than the brief love and death of my fellows."

Sir Walter Rickman paused for a moment in his narrative. The wind whistled and hooted all through that ram-shackle house.

"Look at my face," he said, thrusting it forward as he spoke, and lifting a candle to it. The eyes were clear and bright as sapphires. Only the unkempt

hair and beard disguised its extraordinary youth. Whatever the explanation might be, he looked at least thirty years younger than his age at the lowest computation; and I confess that I was ready to accept his wild story as true when he took a curious flask from a curtained cabinet and held it out to me.

"It has not lost its virtue," he said. "It is yours if you desire it; but I warn you that, so far as I have seen, the gift is not a desirable one; for it locks the only door to the meaning of sorrow and the future of the soul, unless some external catastrophe happens to you, or you should happen to decide later"—he laughed a little grimly—"to die violently by your own hand. Will you have it? Here are the seeds of the cactus from which, in the far future, you can renew your supply." From a little cabinet by the side of the fire he took out two or three small globular seeds of a peculiar ruby translucence. As they lay on the palm of his hand, they looked as if they were illuminated from within.

"Will you have them?" he said.

I thought for a moment of one or two people, men and women whom I would like to endow with life longer than the common lot. Then I shook my head.

Sir Walter went to a window, opened it, and poured the contents of the flask into the night. It gave me a queer sensation to be sitting there while the gift of life for which so many had died an ironical death was being so deliberately rejected.

He came back to the fire and tossed the seeds of the cactus into the blaze. They swelled curiously, hissing in the heat and paling in color till they looked

like huge opals. Then one by one they cracked through the center, and the flames died around them into a faint prismatic aureole, as if a miniature rainbow were shining on that sorrowful hearth.

For a minute or so we sat silently watching it, till the fire leaped up brightly again and the only proof of Sir Walter's tale had vanished for ever.

The storm had raged itself out, and I bade him good-night.

"Good-night and good-by," he said. "I shall not see you again. I have been waiting a long while for the man to whom I could tell the whole tale without being regarded as a hopeless madman. You do not believe it altogether, and yet you have imagination enough to see that it has a universal application. We don't dismiss that sort of thing as nonsense, do we?"

The logic was not impeccable; but when the heavy door clanged behind me and I set out on my homeward way through the last drizzle of the rain, I found that he had given me a good deal to think about. I wondered what he was going to do, for instance, with his own endowment of life, which had yet many generations to run.

The answer to this was given in the newspapers a morning or two later, when it was announced that Sir Walter Rickman had thrown a rope over a beam in one of his own outbuildings, and hanged himself by the neck until his mortal body was quite safely dead. "Temporarily insane," was of course the verdict; but there was at least a possibility that his final act was the most complete proof of his sanity that he could have given.

VI

THE RED RAT

I

SHE was eighteen years old. Her name was Calliope Palfrey and she came from Boston.

She was also a student at one of the big eastern colleges, and she looked like a ten-year-old Cleopatra. She was slim, tall, with black hair, cut—it would be a sacrilege to say “bobbed”—after the fashion of the sphinx-like beauties of Egypt; from which it may be gathered that her ideas were exceedingly “new,” and her mind amazingly “modern.” Her complexion (in spite of occasional attempts to hide it under an inhuman mask of cosmetics) was that of a rose-petal; and her eyes, usually, had the starry and innocent darkness of the eyes of the Dresden Madonna. She had elaborately bound editions of Baudelaire, the *Decameron*, and the unexpurgated *Arabian Nights* of Burton, in her room at college; and she collected what she called the “radical” modern poets. She didn’t quite know what she meant by “radical”; but, as nobody else did—quite—this didn’t matter. She wasted very little time in reading them. They were there chiefly as a proclamation to her friends of what she believed herself to be—an exceedingly emancipated, rebellious, disillusioned and daring daughter of the

New Age. In this she was singularly like the first daughter of Eve.

She could suggest, with one smoldering glance of her dark eyes, that to her the world was a futile place of dust and ashes; and that, on the whole, she resented, proudly, though quietly, her own imprisonment in it. There was a tinge of bitterness in her attitude towards her parents, who were of course responsible for the mistake; and her college-friends were sometimes more than a little anxious about her. They used to debate, darkly, over surreptitious cocoa at midnight, whether Calliope would be found floating in the lake, under a willow-tree, one pale gray morning; or whether an overdose of aspirin would do it. They used to picture the bursting of her bedroom door, and the dreadful discovery: Calliope lying half out of bed, head thrown back over the edge, hair trailing over her eyes, and a copy of *Les Fleurs du Mal* lying where it had fallen out of her lifeless fingers.

Fortunately she was so fond of dancing that she usually went to bed far too tired to think of it, and slept till long after the sun was up. There seemed to be less danger of *felo de se* by daylight.

It was on her first visit to Europe, during the summer vacation, that she met young Fittleworth. She had come over, in a somewhat independent style, lightly chaperoned by the married sister of one of her college-friends; and she brought all her rebellions with her. The faculty at college, and her parents at home, had drawn up lists of the things she ought to admire, the picture galleries she ought to visit, and the pilgrimages she ought to make. She

threw the list overboard on the first day out at sea, and vowed she would do none of those things. Americans were always "doing" places in Europe, and being laughed at for their "provincialism." Very well. She despised patriotism; but, all the same, she would throw her slight weight into the opposite scale, and do something to counterbalance the weak curiosity of her fellow-citizens.

So she did not go to the Tower of London. She let Anna Robbins—her chaperon—go alone instead, and—though a twinge of regret disturbed her at the last moment—she spent the afternoon on her bed, in the hotel, reading the *Temptation of St. Anthony*. Anna was really too Victorian for anything. "Victorian" was hardly the word for the Tower of London, she knew; but it was the attitude of mind she was thinking of, and what other word described it so well? They were all like that, the older generation, especially those who sympathized with the "revolt" of the young.

Mrs. Robbins was only nine years older than Calliope, and knew exactly how to deal with the situation. But she could not alter it. By the exercise of supreme tact she succeeded in getting Calliope into Westminster Abbey—to lay some flowers on the grave of the Unknown Warrior; but Calliope refused to look at the rest of the building, walked out by the nearest door as soon as her tribute was paid, and, thereafter, whenever she passed the Abbey afoot, or by taxicab, closed her eyes tightly so that nobody should ever be able to accuse her of having looked at its gray beauty.

On the other hand, she was quite ready to go to

social functions of a certain kind. Anna had many English friends, and their days were thronged. They went to Ranelagh to see the Anglo-American polo match; and they went to Henley to see the Regatta, with an American crew in the final for the Grand Challenge Cup. They had tea on Phyllis Lawn, and it was there that Calliope met Mr. Roland Fittleworth, of the Magdalen College crew, resplendent in his red blazer and white flannel trousers. She had seen him earlier in the day, rowing, a young Greek god; and though she did not know it, she was more interested in him in that rôle than in his attempts to live up to the dazzling standard of revolt which she unfurled above him, as a fellow-member of the new generation. In fact, she found him distinctly behind the advanced set at Lakeville College, Connecticut. He was little better than a "Victorian," in his literary tastes—liked Tennyson, thought that some of Emerson, even, wasn't bad; and "hadn't any use" for her "radicals," whom he described as "a stuffy crowd."

At the same time, the red blazer on this particular occasion made him a person of distinction. Calliope rather liked to be seen walking on that beautifully matured old lawn with one of the leading "eightsmen," especially as it was obvious to every feminine eye, and to most masculine eyes also, that he was the naïvely delighted captive of her bow and spear. Moreover, he was going to America—with an athletic team—very shortly after the date on which Calliope was returning.

Roland had never met this kind of American girl before, and the encounter took him off his feet.

She looked him straight in the eyes and talked of the most amazing things, to him, things that were taboo among his English sisters; and yet it seemed as if she could walk through a fiery furnace, like a scornful young goddess, unharmed, untouched by smoke or fire. She trod it all underfoot, and her eyes were untroubled as mountain-pools, full to their depths of the clear sky.

He took her out in a punt on the river, on their last evening at Henley; and, as they glided between the Chinese lanterns of the house-boats, she talked like a pagan shepherdess in an idyll of some new American Theocritus, of the ways of young men and maidens in the civilization of the New World. But, under her talk, amusing enough to anyone who had not Roland's quickly acquired sense that it was of considerable importance to himself and his future life—there was a tone of youthful bitterness, suggesting that she was inwardly at war, and did not really like the "movements" with which she had chosen to identify herself.

He looked at her, puzzled. What did she mean? Why was she saying these things? The faintest flicker of a smile curved one corner of her mouth. But it was the bow of Diana, not of Eros. There was an air of dainty scorn, as of an amused immortal discussing mortal foibles. It was long before he realized that she was simply talking as one undergraduate to another; and apparently she was a somewhat disillusioned undergraduate.

"Nobody seems to care what happens to the new generation. Perhaps, after all, it doesn't very much matter what we think or do. We want to think

for ourselves, of course, but when you are setting out on a voyage you don't expect your seniors to smash the compass and throw all the charts overboard, and then congratulate you on your new liberty."

This was a new Calliope, and one that would have astonished Anna Robbins; for she was giving reasons that had hitherto been suppressed for her theory that "nothing mattered."

Roland answered her, with the stumbling honesty of the young athlete, that he thought it mattered very much indeed. He became painfully sentimental about it.

"The men I know who think nothing matters may one day want to give the best that is in them to someone that they love; and if they have spoiled the best——"

"Ah, well, if they're all in the same boat, none of them will know what they've missed," she said, a little bitterly. "It's not the fault of the young generation. We've been robbed of almost everything we could believe in, by the older generation. Most of the faculty at Lakeville are like that. They want to be in 'the movement' and they're frightened to death of being thought to be out of the movement. It's the bored old men and women, and the old-fashioned journals, like your *Spectator*, that have been telling us, from our cradles, that we are in revolt. They sneer everything simple and natural and decent out of you. Of course, we are in revolt now—against everything, against Nature itself. What else can we be? These old men and women haven't left us a belief or a certainty in the

world; and they are continually leering at us, and psycho-analyzing us, and giving us mad pictures to look at, and mad books to read; and sometimes, after a little preliminary free-verse, trying to make free-love to us. I've a trunkful of letters at the hotel from one of our professors. He introduced me to the radical poets. (They're in our college text-books now.) I think that what most of my set feel is that we might as well let things rip. There doesn't seem to be anything real or true in this devilish thing they call civilization.

"In my first year at college"—she adopted the acidly bantering tone which she had, doubtless, acquired from the elderly "radical," a tone that jarred upon Roland horribly—"for my first two terms, I was very sweet and natural and pure-minded"—Roland winced—"and I didn't want to discuss the stuff my elders were wallowing in. But that phase was soon over. My English professor made a report on my work, to the faculty, at the end of the year. I had to sit like a little sparrow on a rail in front of them all while he did it; and he ended up by saying with a sort of malignant snigger that I was a thoroughly respectable person and a great supporter of institutions! Now, could *you* stand that? I made up my mind that they should never snigger at me again. So I'm a rebel now, with the best of them. I subscribe to *The Minute-Hand*, the thing that was suppressed by the police, you know, and I'm all out for Bolshevik paintings, free architecture (which means turning houses upside down, and putting the doors where the windows are now) and the smashing of all institutions. If

colleges and high-class intellectual journals, like our *Minute-Hand* and your *Spectator*, are among the institutions that get smashed, so much the better. Our chapel was burned down last winter and some of our students got pneumonia from dancing fox-trots round it, drunk, in the snow—while the radical professors were getting their old gray locks singed, trying to save the hymn-books.”

He stopped paddling and looked at her. She was concealing something under this banter, concealing the sad little intellectual wounds that the elderly cynics have inflicted upon her generation; and, though Roland did not understand it, there was something behind her light talk that hurt him, also. She looked more Egyptian than ever, a sphinx-like child, dark, beautiful and a little sadder than any one of her age ought to look.

With a stroke of his paddle he sent the punt drifting in among the sleeping lilies of a backwater. A moment later—without knowing quite how it happened—he was at her side, trying to explain that, even in modern times, there was such a thing as “love at first sight.” For a minute or two she let her hand rest in his own. Then, abruptly, she withdrew it; and looked at him with a sullen cloud in her eyes, while she explained that, firstly, she had no illusions about love; and, secondly, that though she liked him well enough in some respects, she could never marry a man who was not at least as notoriously modern a figure in art or literature as the recently acquired husband of her best friend, Sophie Pringle. Her cruelly pretty lips chose their phrases less directly; but their meaning was none the

less obvious. She had been impressed by the halo worn (in advanced circles) by Sophie's husband—the spectrist poet and well-known contributor to *The Minute-Hand*—Jabez Podd; and just as she would follow the fashion in clothes, whether she really liked it or not, so this other modishness of a coterie had laid hold upon her.

Roland tried hard to persuade her that his interest in music was at least an offset to his ignorance of the other arts.

"You have told me," she said, "that you care for very little of the really modern work; and in my set, the people of whom you are fondest are simply barred. Handel is to them almost as early Victorian as the Venus of Milo——"

"But is the Venus of Milo——"

"Certainly, in a spiritual sense; and you have a cast of her in your room at college. But I've heard you talk of Mendelssohn, too; and you have no idea how hopeless all that would be in my set. Good heavens! Have you never heard of the Green Negress?"

"But, Calliope! I'm not going to let a pack of musicians stand in the way. Surely you. . . ."

"Prove that you will justify *me* in the eyes of the new set: prove that I shall not run any risk of being sniggered at again as a respectable little supporter of institutions, with a 'middle-class mind': prove that—oh, well"—her eyes softened a little—"why don't you try to go one better than Jabez Podd, and write something really new and vital, something that would really put Sophie's nose just a wee bit out of joint?"

"I'll have a shot, if that's the condition. It oughtn't to be so difficult, judging by the stuff you showed me in his last book. And if I succeed, you'll——"

She answered him with a glance of her dark eyes that made his head swim. The next moment he was trying to kiss her, and was at once called to order, with a sternness that startled him. And yet, to his absolute bewilderment, when they were safely disembarked and standing on the shadowy deck of the house-boat to say good-by, her face lifted to his own. Before he fully realized that her lips had touched his lips, she had gone.

II

About a fortnight later some humorous goblin arranged that Sir Douglas Gribble, the distinguished alienist—an old friend of Mr. Fittleworth senior—should dine with the Fittleworths at their town house in Chester Square.

After dinner, in the library, Sir Douglas picked up an odd-looking little book that appeared to be bound in vermillion and yellow cubes. It was Jabez Podd's latest volume entitled *Windmills and Watercress*. One of the fascinations of his style, it will be remembered, was in its curious juxtaposition of phrases that had no possible connection with one another. Roland had been studying it before dinner, trying vainly to extract some glimmer of light upon the general aims of what American critics called the "radicals," and the direction, in particular, in which Calliope wished him to go.

"Curious," said Sir Douglas. "Very curious. I have just been reading some stuff very like this. In fact, I come across a great deal of it in my day's work. But the odd thing is that I've a whole mass of it, in typescript, in my dispatch-case. It was done by one of my patients, during his twelve months in a private lunatic asylum. He spent one day a week dancing like a fury in a padded room; and the rest of the time he let off steam by writing what he called 'poetry' and illustrating it in the style of the very newest artists. It was a very interesting case. He improved a little during the last two months of his stay. His relations—much against my advice—want to try the experiment of humoring him at home now. His first achievement was to get all the stuff he wrote at the asylum typed out, and to send me a copy for my opinion on its literary merits. He wants to get it published, and thinks a testimonial from me would help him. If you will hand me that dispatch-case, Roland, I'll show you something that will cure you of this sort of thing for ever and a day."

Sir Douglas unlocked the brown leather case and took out a bulky mass of typescript. Then he opened the poems of Jabez Podd, and propped them up against a tobacco-jar.

"Close your eyes, please, Roland. I'm going to read you a poem—only eight lines. When I've finished, you shall tell me whether it's by your friend Podd, or *my* friend, the lunatic. How far have you read in *Windmills and Water-cress*?"

"Only to page forty."

"Good. If I choose anything from Podd it shall

be from one of his later pages, so that your memory can't aid you. The first poem is entitled *The Cow*, and it runs thus:

"Cow, in the black grass,
Why does your white tail
Creak like a clockwork toy?
Cow, I am afraid
You are a supporter of institutions.
She only looked at me, like an angry moon,
And mooed '*You blackguard*,
How dare you speak to me without an introduction?' "

"Now, then, Roland, author, please?"

"Oh, that's an easy one, Sir Douglas. Podd, of course. It's absolutely the style of his later satirical work."

"Wrong. It's my lunatic. Try again. The next poem is entitled *Mud*, and it runs thus:

"Mud creeps,
And crawls.
Blood crawls,
And creeps;
And mud's mud,
And blood's blood.
But, occasionally, they stand up and make a
speech,
And are mistaken for barn-door fowls,
Or politicians, or——
Listen! That's a cuckoo!"

"Oh, obviously, that's *your* lunatic!"

"Wrong again, my boy, that's Podd! And it has a whole page of hand-made paper to itself, with

beautiful wide margins, see. Try just once more. The next one is called *Divorce*, and it consists of four lines:

“She told John Farthingale
That marriages were made in heaven,
So he twisted one of her stockings round her neck
And hung her to the hat-rack.”

“Surely that’s a Podd—a Podd in what Calliope calls ‘his later manner.’ It’s so terse and—er—so compact, don’t you think?”

“No. Incidentally, I’ve dealt with this—er—lyric, in a little monograph I’m writing. This lyric, Roland, was composed an hour or two before my lunatic made a dangerous attack on his butler and tried to throttle him with a bell-rope. I won’t read you any more. I think you’ll agree that I’ve proved my case. A lot of this sort of thing is being done to-day, used in anthologies, and exhibited at picture galleries. It all comes from the same breakdown (it’s a breakdown, not a ‘revolt’) of our weaker members against a civilization that is too big for them; and it can be studied with all the other Bolshhevisms, in almost any of our lunatic asylums. It’s all a-rhythmical, corresponding exactly to certain physical conditions. Occasionally, a few misguided and comparatively sane persons, I suppose, waste time by abandoning their minds to it; as anyone could who wished to do so. But they run the risk of mental deterioration.”

By a chance that was fraught with extraordinary consequences for Roland, Sir Douglas laid the manuscript down on a table near him, and forgot all

about it when he said good-night. Roland discovered it a quarter of an hour later when he was alone in the library, and he turned over the pages with a queer excitement. It was entitled *The Red Rat, and Other Poems*; and it was so unmistakably akin to the products of what Calliope, half mockingly, but half seriously, called the "vital vanguard," that he wanted to show it to her. He might even convert her with it.

It would have to be returned to Sir Dougas very soon, of course, but he thought it so powerful an antidote to the noxious stuff with which Calliope had been dosed that he determined to take it round to her hotel at once, in a taxicab, and leave it there with a note, asking her to read it as soon as possible, and telling her that he would call for it on the following day.

Unfortunately, his hurried note was written on two half-sheets, and when Calliope opened the parcel, in bed the next morning, she noticed only the second of these. It contained only these sentences:

"DARLING,—if you find the poems which I now send you equal to the work of Podd, or any other of his school, you will, I feel sure, look at the matter in a new light and give me—before you sail—a little more hope."

When he called at the hotel the next day, at noon, he was startled to hear that Mrs. Robbins and Calliope had left that morning for Paris. By the last post that evening he received a note from Calliope, written just before she left the hotel—a note that horrified him. Of course, she must have read the manuscript very hurriedly, or she would never

have made so appalling a mistake. This was how it ran:

"DEAR ROLAND,

"I could eat no breakfast this morning, I was so enthralled by your wonderful *Red Rat*. It's pure genius. It achieves perfectly what Podd and all the most advanced people of the new school have been only trying to do. It will create a tremendous stir in America. And to think that you have done this for *me*!

"I'm so sorry not to see you before we sail. We are going to do a little shopping in Paris and shall join the boat at Cherbourg. I shall take the greatest care of your book and will return it to you when you arrive in America. It's a very short time now, isn't it, before you will be sailing, and I have a little plan about it which I think will please you.

"I feel terribly humiliated to think how I chattered to an artist who is as much greater than Podd as Podd is greater than Longfellow.

"Yours, if you don't utterly despise me,

"CALLIOPE."

He must disillusion her at once, he thought, and also get the book returned immediately. Sir Douglas would be furious if it went to America. A telegram must go to Calliope in the morning. It was too late to-night.

But it is easier to shoot a swallow on the wing than to hit the exact address of any American in Europe.

From the London hotel, Roland obtained the address of an American bank in Paris, and wrote to it. He also wrote, as a measure of precaution, to the ship by which they were to sail. Fortunately, Sir Douglas had been called away to a consultation in

Scotland, so that he would probably not miss the book for a week or two. Four days went by, and no answer came. On the fifth day, Roland received a brief note on the paper of the White Star Line, which showed him that he had just missed Calliope. She had changed her boat, and was sailing a fortnight earlier than she had intended. Also she declared that she was "thrilled to the spinal cord to think what she was taking over to the few, the happy few, the little band of brothers and sisters in America. Not that it will be confined to these. It's the great book of democratic lyricism that we've all been waiting for; the incarnate spirit of revolt against—oh, against everything that has been hampering and hindering us for so long."

"And when you come to think of it," said Roland to himself, "there's really some truth in her last remark, though in a different sense from what she intended."

He did not criticize Calliope; for as Sir Douglas had remarked, "it is a cataleptic world," and the young and the sane are often hypnotized into their opinions by the suggestions of those around them. Jabez Podd had been taken seriously by the press of two continents; and, by the most conscientious exercise of his own intelligence, Roland was unable to see any real difference in quality between his work and that from the lunatic asylum, except that Podd was, if anything, a little more meaningless. Yet, as he knew, Professor Poult had devoted a chapter to him in his *Introduction to the Study of Poetry*, for use in schools and colleges, and explained that as he was "newer" he was necessarily an "advance" on

all the poetry of the past. Poor little Calliope. How could she stand up against this cataleptic mass of silliness? There was something almost pathetic about her gropings in that intellectual fog, a humorous pathos, as of a new Alice in Wonderland, when the baby turns into a pig. But he could not stifle a secret pleasure in the thought that the shock of this last mistake—when she knew the truth—might break the spell of her “vital vanguard” once and for all. He would have to do it gently or she might be hurt. She might think that he had deliberately fooled her. So he would not write. He would be seeing her in six weeks or so; and, in the meantime, he must pacify Sir Douglas as well as he could.

Sir Douglas took the accident very well; but, two days before Roland sailed, the great specialist wrote to him a somewhat disturbing letter:

“DEAR ROLAND,

“The author of *The Red Rat* has suddenly become so anxious to get his property back that I’m afraid he may have a relapse if his mind is not relieved about it. I have had to explain the difficulty to his relatives, and—rather foolishly, I think—they tried to pacify him by telling him that it was being submitted to an American editor. He immediately jumped to the conclusion that somebody over there would try to rob him of his laurels; and (though, of course, he oughtn’t to be out at all) he has insisted on going down to the American Express Company’s Office every day and looking through all the literary columns of the American newspapers. They tell me he thinks he has just discovered one of his own poems in print there, accompanied by a note to the effect that the ‘dynamically modern’ young author of *The Red Rat*, Mr. Roland Fittleworth, is expected to arrive very shortly in

America, and will be entertained by the Vanguard Club of Lakeville College, Connecticut.

"I'm afraid your young friend has been playing a joke on you; but it may have troublesome consequences. My expatient is now insisting that he must go over to America by the very next boat, to claim what he calls his just dues; by which, I take it, he means not only his manuscript, but the glory which he thinks is being stolen from him. I am afraid he will get there almost as soon as this letter. Fortunately his relatives are wealthy and able to humor him. They've got a good man to look after him. The voyage will do him no harm; but my advice to you is to get into touch with his companion as soon as they arrive and restore his book. I suggested that we should cable for it to be returned here; but my lunatic—his name, oddly enough, is Pease, Montague Pease—has tasted from afar the poisonous honey of publicity, and he wants a little more. Nothing will stop him now short of sending him back to the asylum.

"Yours always sincerely,

"DOUGLAS GRIBBLE."

III

During his voyage across the Atlantic, Roland often wondered what Calliope meant by saying that she had a plan with regard to *The Red Rat* which she thought would please him. The *Gigantic* had no sooner swung to rest off the Liberty Statue than he began to be enlightened. A gang of newspaper reporters—excited by various paragraphs and extracts from the book which had lately appeared in their columns—crowded aboard, looking uncommonly like a gang of plain-clothes policemen in search of a criminal. Unfortunately the best papers had not sent their representatives down; and Roland suddenly

found himself in the midst of a strangely sardonic group of men who all seemed to be trying to trap him into saying something that he ought not to say. He had had no experience of this kind of thing, and did not even faintly realize what it would feel like to see his own remarks staring at him in cold print the next morning. Once or twice, in answer to questions about various famous writers, he volunteered his frank private opinion that Mr. X was "an awful ass," and Mr. Y "a little tick." He supposed, a little uneasily, that it was his British slang that made two of the reporters nudge each other so gaily, and the pencils move so merrily over the paper.

"What do you think about Oireland, Mr. Fittleworth?" asked a ferocious little man.

"I wish Ireland was at the bottom of the sea," said Roland and immediately there was a sound as of innumerable mice industriously nibbling all round him—the scratching of the fountain-pens in a dozen note-books.

He had been wondering how he should evade any question about his "works"—for he did not want to let Calliope down until he had seen her; but, to his relief, the reporters seemed to prefer his views on questions of quite a different kind. It was not till the note-books and their owners had disappeared that Roland felt a strange sinking of the stomach, such as he had never felt after his conversational efforts at home.

But he had little time to think. His boat had been delayed two days. Calliope met him on the dock with a distinguished-looking gentleman whom she introduced as Mr. Jennings, his publisher. Before

he had time to protest—indeed, the memory of the reporters and the search for his keys while the customs officials were clamoring to examine his baggage, together with the adorable expression in the eyes of Calliope, not to speak of the piquant little hat she was wearing, made it impossible to collect his thoughts—it was explained to him that his first engagement was fixed for Saturday evening at the Lakeville Alumnae Literary Club in New York. He was to be the chief guest at a reception there, and read some of his poems, including “The Cow,” by special request. If he had been able to talk to Calliope alone, he might have extricated himself from the tangle; but he was desperately anxious not to hurt her feelings by letting her appear in a ridiculous light, and he got deeper and deeper into the mess with every minute that went by. The publishers had the book all printed, he gathered, and anticipated a splendid sale. Their advance-work had placed him among the first poets of the age. His forehead grew cold and damp as he listened. What on earth was he to do? It looked as if large sums of money might be involved! At last, in a kind of dazed dream, at his hotel, he found himself saying good-by to “his publisher.” He turned desperately to Calliope and tried to explain what had happened.

She looked startled at first, but she recovered her composure quickly.

“It doesn’t matter what happens after to-night,” she said. “But we’ve *got* to make the Vanguard Club swallow it, too. They’ve already gone into raptures over some of the separate poems as they appeared in *The Minute-Hand*. After all, why

shouldn't we destroy the Vanguard Club just as much as any other institution? I knew it was all nonsense, of course, but it was the latest craze, so I went in for it. But now"—her face lightened suddenly, shone with delight—"don't you see this is the very best thing that ever happened. We shall score off them all. They'll never be able to snigger at anyone again! Roland, you Angel! If you can keep it up for one more evening—make them take it seriously—I'll——"

"You'll marry me?"

"We shall be engaged from the moment when they pass the solemn vote of thanks to you. Don't be late, will you? I'll bring *The Red Rat* with me to the Club!"

But it was not until he was halfway through dressing for his ordeal, on the following Saturday, that he realized what an exciting evening it was likely to be. He was just tying his white tie, when the telephone bell rang, and the hotel operator informed him that someone wanted to see him on important business and was waiting below for him, in the lobby. The visitor's name was Montague Pease.

Roland had hardly expected to be hunted down so soon, and he was determined to carry out his agreement with Calliope. It would be dreadful to be balked at the last moment. He hurried down to the lobby and picked out his man, at once—a huge round-shouldered, red-bearded brute, lurching up and down like a caged animal, and attracting considerable attention by his ferocious expression, and the way in which he gnawed his finger-nails.

"Mr. Pease?" said Roland, tentatively.

"Ah, at last," said that individual. "What is all this I've been seeing in the papers about a reading from my works to-night, at the Lakeville Club? The talented young author, Mr. Roland Fittleworth—grrr, I'll have your liver out, if you aren't careful. *The Red Rat*, that is the name of my book, isn't it?" He thrust an evening newspaper under Roland's nose.

"Of course, of course," said Roland ingratiatingly. "There has been a very silly mistake for which—er—the publishers to whom the book was submitted are responsible. I am just as angry about it as you can be." A wild plan flashed into his mind for getting Mr. Pease out of the way till the reading was over. "Look here," he said, "I wish you would go at once to the publisher's private house. He lives at the other end of New York, and it won't take you very long by taxi-cab. It's the publisher who is insisting that I am the author. You go along to him at once and tell him that this thing must stop!"

"Yes. That's a good idea," said Mr. Pease. "I'll take a rope with me, too. I suppose there are plenty of hat-racks in his house."

"Oh, any number, I should think," said Roland nonchalantly. "He's rather a dressy fellow. I should start at once, if I were you. The porter who brought my baggage in could lend you a rope."

"But what about this reading to-night?" said Mr. Pease suspiciously.

"We must stop it, of course," said Roland, "but you must go and grapple the publisher first. You'll have plenty of time to bring what is left of him to

the meeting. You see, it is the publisher who puts the names on the books, isn't it, and sends all these things out to the papers? Mr. Jennings, the publisher of *The Red Rat*, told me this morning that he had sent out thousands of leaflets about the book attributing it to me. Why, he told me himself that his advance work here had placed me among the leading poets of the day, a place, Mr. Pease, that rightfully belongs to you."

"I'll smash his face in with the jagged end of a broken whisky-bottle," snarled Mr. Pease.

"No. Don't do that," said Roland, whose plan was developing rapidly, "or you'll destroy your only possible source of royalties. You must persuade him, gently, to come to the meeting, and help us to set things right. Here is his card. The porter will get you a taxi."

Mr. Pease lurched heavily and furiously towards the swing-doors and, as soon as he was safely out of the way, Roland went to the telephone booth and called up Mr. Jennings. His conversation with that gentleman was an extremely curious one, and his warning that the real author of *The Red Rat* was on his way to see Mr. Jennings, and his advice as to the best way of dealing with that author and getting into touch immediately with his keeper-companion, caused a considerable flutter in the publisher's household, an attack of palpitations on the part of Mrs. Jennings, and incipient hysterics on the part of the devoted maid who was destined to receive the visitor.

Then Roland dashed out, secured a taxi-cab, and drove as quickly as possible to the Lakeville Club.

He would have a clear three-quarters of an hour, he thought, to secure his own effect, before the arrival of the avenging Mr. Pease, even if the plan for his detention failed. Calliope met Roland in the little room behind the platform, and gave him his first printed copy of *The Red Rat*, a startlingly bound volume in green and red, with his own name prominently displayed on the cover.

"They particularly want you to read *Creeps the Worm*," she whispered. "It's the last in the book. I should end with it."

Then she left him to the chairman, a fat pimply-faced young man with damp hands, who escorted him through a door directly on to the platform. He was greeted with rapturous applause, by an assembly of at least one hundred people. To Roland they looked like a thousand. The chairman made a few introductory remarks that would have warmed the heart of Shakespeare himself, and then called upon Roland to give his eagerly awaited reading.

He began with the poem entitled *The Cow*, and explained that, while it was "modern of the moderns," it was an attempt to recapture the child's simplicity of vision, in the manner of the Post-Impressionists. He read it very solemnly, and it was received with acclamation.

He followed it with "one of those ethereal Sighs of Art"—this was how the reporter was preparing to describe it, in print, if the approaching cataclysm had allowed it—"one of those ethereal Sighs of Art which we now value so much more than the naïvely meaningful work of former generations. Here, in delicately fluttering syllables, was that essential

music which eluded even Shelley. The rhetorical and rational lucidity of *Adonais*, with its set, mechanical form, borrowed from Spenser, sank into insignificance in comparison with this airy music, Celtic or otherwise, whose very title—*Kubloo Khant*—proclaimed its superiority!”

“There is nothing to say.

There is nothing, nothing to find.

They are all gone away

Through woods that are blind.

The dark woods are shaken;

But Time will never awaken.

Loosen your wild hair,

Let it stream out behind,

And away!—Where?—

Where?

Out—out of his mind!

Away!”

“As a relief to this ecstasy, he returned to an Elizabethan simplicity of outlook in his *Milk-maids*, an exquisite example of the art that conceals art, and also of the bird-like note and fresh vision of the unspoiled eye”—so said the reporter, regardless of the rapidly approaching doom—“for the author of *The Red Rat* had many moods”:

“I like to squint at cows

Through gates on summer days.

I like the way they browse;

For, laughing loud, I says—

‘Butter-cups, crunched at noon,

You’ll all be butter, soon!’

"I like those wriggling girls,
Those teasing milk-maids, too.
I like their mad-cap curls
And eyes of bubbling dew.
The way they talk of curds
Reminds me of the birds.

"Lord, what a pleasant thing
The farmer's life must be—
To keep great crows, and swing
Young milk-maids on his knee.
Lord, I should be a Turk,
If farming were my work!"

But the success of the evening was the realistic lyric entitled *Creeps the Worm*. Roland explained that those three words had been the nucleus of the work and constituted its metrical climax. There was an awful hush as he read:

"Creeps—creeps—the Worm,
Through the yellow skull
With the gold-filled teeth,
In at the right eye,
Out at the left eye,
In at the jaws,
Where he waggles his tail
Like a bloody tongue,
Till it looks as if
The skull were putting
Its tongue out at you.
Creeps—creeps—the Worm.
What is he looking for?
Brains! Brains!
And the brains are gone!

That's why the skull
Is grinning to find
The Worm still creeps—
Creeps the Worm."

"Oh, how realithtic! They *do* thay 'bloody' in England! I've heard them!" lisped an enraptured school-teacher to a petrified pupil.

"I want to thank you for that perfectly thrilling poem *Creeps the Worm*," said the rosy lips of at least twenty adorably youthful maidens, one after another, as they shook his hand at the informal reception that followed the reading.

"Stick to it my boy," said a cadaverous-looking clergyman, "I've been trying to get just that note of *Creeps the Worm* into my Sermons for half a century. That's the stuff to give them."

"I am an elocutionist," remarked a buxom young woman with a resonant voice, shoulders that emerged from her evening gown like ice-cream from an emerald goblet, and a crown of red hair that seemed to be doing its best to melt it. "I want to tell you that the tremolo effect which you got into *Creeps the Worm* is perfectly wonderful. Why, it just made me cold all down my spine. I wish you would allow me to deliver that pome at my next public recital."

"With pleasure," said Roland.

"Then will you explain one thing to me?" said the elocutionist. "One likes to get all the details perfectly right, in the interpretation of a pome. Would you please tell me whether there should be a comma after Creeps? Is Creeps the name of the worm? Like *Cripps*, the Carrier, you know."

"No," said Roland, indignantly, "it's a verb."

He saw a rubicund and massive lady moving across the room towards him, with the air of being about to say something very important.

"Mr. Fittleworth," she said in a deep bass voice, as she grasped his hand and looked into his startled eyes, "I want to tell you that I have sat on Dean Stanley's knee."

Before Roland had grasped that this was an intimation of immortality based on a recollection of early childhood, and was meant to suggest that his reading was the second historical event in her life, there was a commotion at the door.

Mr. Jennings, the publisher, looking very pale, advanced through the crowd, followed by a short, thick-set man who carried a cracked bowler hat in his hand, wore his tie under his ear, and looked extremely serious. They mounted the platform together, and the extraordinary expression on Mr. Jennings' face silenced the room and drew all eyes to him before he had spoken a word. His coat looked as if he had been rubbing himself against a white-washed wall, and on his right cheek there was a long scratch, still bleeding, which he mopped from time to time with his handkerchief.

"I am glad to see that I am in time," he remarked in a hollow voice. "A very painful thing has happened, and I thought it best to come here at once and warn you that the real author of *The Red Rat* has escaped."

"Escaped!" the audience whispered one to another. "What does he mean?" "He means that it was all *bug-house* poetry," cried a shrill terror-

stricken voice; and at this the man with the bowler hat took up the explanation.

"The truth of the matter is," ne said, "that Mr. Pease 'as 'ad a relapse, and I arrived too late at Mr. Jennings' 'ouse to catch him. 'E's on 'is way here now, and from what Mr. Jennings tells me 'e's likely to be dangerous. 'E was in my charge, and we all thought he was going along nicely, but these things you have been reading here to-night were what 'e wrote when 'e was an inmate of Dukeswood, and I suppose 'aving them brought up like this has set him off again. My advice to you all is that you'll get away 'ome before 'e arrives, or I may 'ave a lot of trouble with 'im."

The audience gasped like one person, and some of the women began hastily to pull their cloaks round them and make for the door. But they were too late. Before the first of them reached it, the door was flung open with a crash and the infuriated author of *The Red Rat* stood in the opening, armed with a large pair of garden shears, which Mr. Jennings had purchased earlier in the day, for use at his country home.

"So," he snarled, "I've caught you. You've been listening all the evening to an impostor, and now you shall sit there and listen to me. The first person who tries to get through this door I'll cut his nose off. Sit down, will you!" And he snapped his shears so ferociously that the audience obeyed him as if they were doing military drill.

"Listen to me! This is a poem I composed on my way here. It's called *Snip!* Lend me that fur for a moment, please."

He snatched a fur of many heads and tails from the shoulders of Miss Pringle, who was seated nearest to him, and held it up as a huntsman holds the brush over the gaping hounds. Then he began to recite:

"Snip—snip—snip.

*She gave him love, and cold mutton
And potatoes and purity,
And cold water."*

Here he savagely snipped off one of the tails of Miss Pringle's fur. She gave a sharp, muffled cry, but was immediately cowed by the blood-shot glaze with which he swept the whole audience, as he continued:

"Snip—snip—snip.

*She wore scarlet-heeled shoes on Good Friday
And a bustle of crêpe on Christmas Day,
And always made the tea
With even cooler water."*

Here he snipped off a head from the fur. It slithered along the polished wooden floor like a live creature, with its eyes of black beads.

"Snip—snip—snip.

*At Candlemas he became a free radical
And dropped her down the well behind the garage
Into the coolest water of all."*

Two more heads and a tail went slithering, amongst feet that withdrew as if at the onset of live rats.

"Snip—snip—snip.

*And if that don't beat the 'Sonnets from the
Portuguese,'*

You can put my head under the pump

And cool it, in the refrigerator."

Here he deliberately chopped Miss Pringle's fur into six-inch sections and kicked them into the midst of the audience.

Mr. Jennings and the Chairman had more than once made a move, as though they were screwing themselves up to tackle the formidable author of *The Red Rat*; but the experienced man with the bowler hat whispered sound advice to them, and they took it.

"Keep still. Bide your time," he whispered. "'E's as strong as ten men when 'e's like this, and 'e's got them shears, too. We'll 'ave to 'umor 'im for a bit. Look out! What's 'e up to now?"

Mr. Pease was locking the door and putting the key in his pocket. Then to the horror of everyone he switched out the lights. For a few seconds in the pitchy darkness there was dead silence. It was followed by a loud snap of the shears from an unexpected direction, a wild squeal, a hubbub of shrieks, a loud masculine bellow, apparently from the direction of the platform; and then, for a minute or two, the writhing, struggling, heaving, fighting panic of a frightened crowd of women, among overturned chairs, trying to find a locked door and avoid a lunatic in the darkness of an unfamiliar room.

Someone eventually found the switches, and the light burst upon one of the oddest scenes in the history of literary clubs. Many of the members were

sprawling on the floor. One of them was clutching a handful of Miss Pringle's heads and tails, firmly, as if to prevent them from biting. Others were huddled in the corners. The Chairman and the man with the bowler were panting below the platform. They had apparently been trying to strangle each other, in the belief that they were dealing with Mr. Pease.

On the platform itself, Mr. Jennings stood with his back to the audience, facing the triumphant author of *The Red Rat*. Mr. Jennings had lost the tails of his coat, and one regrets to say that there seemed to be a piece taken out of his trousers also. The author of *The Red Rat* dominated the whole scene. Gaily poking the shears at Mr. Jennings with one hand and waving the black pieces of Mr. Jennings' raiment in the other he chanted in stentorian tones a recollection of his own youth:

*"Many a mad magenta minute
Lights the lavender of life!
Keran Happuch at her spinet
Psalms the scarlet song of strife,
Keran Happuch is my wifel!"*

Roland had caught Calliope's hand when the lights went out and drawn her under one sheltering side of the platform. They stood there, for a moment, surveying the scene; then—quickly—before anyone noticed them, they slipped through the little door into the room behind the platform, and left the building.

IV

Precisely what happened to the Lakeville Literary Club afterwards, Roland and Calliope never knew. But they gathered that the later scenes were too "radical" to be described. They were so "radical" that it was obviously useless to advocate anything more "radical"; and the Club, having fulfilled its use, changed its name and took to bridge and "social service."

On the other hand Mr. Jennings, when he had recovered from the first shock, realized that the new development should have an enormous "publicity value"; and *The Red Rat*, with a new author's name on the cover, went into many editions, and was widely quoted in anthologies for educational purposes in schools and colleges. It was also reviewed most respectfully by the *Minute-Hand* and the *Spectator*.

But Roland and Calliope had finished with "radical" poetry. He had been invited to stay at her summer home in Maine; and so they had left Mr. Pease to his "publicity," and were wandering through the lonely woods of Mount Paradise. Calliope named the unfamiliar birds for Roland, as they walked; and Roland paid no attention to them, but watched her face, and listened to her voice.

"No, that's not *The Red Rat*," she said, as a peculiarly rasping note arose among the spruce-trees. "That's the Black-throated Green-warbler; and that little crested bird, up there, in the hemlock, with the rosy feathers and the lovely warble—no—that's not Mr. Jennings, it's a Purple Finch."

"Rather like a Ruffed Grouse from fairyland," said Roland.

But this was not the serious business of the morning. In the middle of a secluded glade they raked together a sweet-smelling heap of resinous pine-needles. On this elfin pyre Roland placed two Turkish cigarettes, and over these Calliope laid the letters from her English Professor. Then Roland took their only copy of *The Red Rat* from his pocket, and placed it on the pyre, and Calliope topped it with the Works of Jabez Podd. Pages from the *Spectator* and the *Minute-Hand* made their kindling. They struck two matches, and set it alight together. They fed the flames with more pine-needles, till all the "radicalism" was consumed.

Then, across the smoldering pyre, Calliope stretched out her left hand and Roland slipped the ring upon her third finger.

VII

THE FOURTH GENERATION

I

JOHN ERSKINE glowered at his nephew across the dinner-table.

"Nothing can save you, Denis," he said, thrusting forward his drink-reddened, heavy-jowled face, "nothing except a prolonged course of good, gross, materialistic living. There is such a thing, you know, as drowning in idealism."

The wide windows of the room in which this odd remark was made were on the western side of the huge old house. There was a whisper of the sea in the distance beyond the whispering gardens. The sunset behind misty blue trees faintly colored and subdued the whole scene, so that even on that table at which the three men lingered, all "gross materialities" were beginning to vanish. Silver and fruit, glass and flowers, were delicately blurred and softened, as if the beautiful vagueness of the evening sky had stolen quietly into the room.

They were representatives of three different generations at that table. Edward Erskine, the father of John, stared sadly out at the fading light; but, old as he was, his long white silky hair and thin ascetic features, so bloodless as to seem almost translucent, gave him more of a family likeness to his

great-nephew than to his own son. John must have been a reversion to some robust eighteenth-century fox-hunter. Denis, the boy of twenty-five, to whom the strange remark had been addressed, sat drumming with nervous fingers on the table. His face was lean and pale as that of the old man, and at first sight it was difficult to tell whether his thin colorless hair was that of an old man or a young. Only the dark, smoldering eyes gave him a feverish semblance of youth.

"Speaking seriously, Denis," his uncle continued, with the dogged look of a man wading out of a sea of folly to the solid and reasonable earth, "I tell you that it is time for you to begin a rational human life. You must stop drumming on the table with those damned fingers of yours to begin with, and then, if you have any sense in your head at all, some time within the next six months, you will marry Millicent."

"Well, uncle—" Denis lit a cigarette with a tremulous hand—"if you say I must, I suppose, that settles it. But isn't one supposed to—er—fall in love before one goes about marrying people?"

"Love!" cried John Erskine, growing hotter in the face than ever. "Love is all very well for poets and tinkers, but you ought to know by this time, Denis, that in our family, marriages are a serious matter. We don't mate like hedge-sparrows."

"Of course not," the old man chirruped. "Of course not. Our marriages have always been *arranged*."

"Love," growled John Erskine again. "What

would your horses be like if we trusted the breed to the good luck of love!"

Denis chuckled. "I'd be a little more likely to believe in all that, uncle, if our arrangements, as you call them, had ever been made with a scientific eye to the breed. But when have people like ourselves ever cared twopence about that? A pretty lot, physically, some of our ancestors have been. You know as well as I do that our eugenics have always been concerned with the union of money-bags and estates, and never"—his voice rose to a shrill note—"never with the personal qualities of people, physical or mental."

"Don't the money-bags enable them to acquire qualities, give them opportunities, extending over many generations, to——"

"Oh, I know that's the common clap-trap. But look at my spindle-shanks. Would all the wealth in the world help me to jump a five-barred gate? And look at Millicent's pretty forget-me-not eyes! Will all the estates in the world give her one touch of imagination? And, to make things worse, by taking away what I call 'love,' you take away the only thing that does lay stress on personal qualities, you take away the only element of choice and real selection in the whole affair. Why on earth should we deceive ourselves, uncle? Wouldn't it have been very much better for us all if my great-grandfather had married a Devonshire milkmaid, or a strapping musical comedy actress? I promised to sell my soul for you. But we may as well tell each other the truth about it."

"Dear me, dear me," chirped Edward Erskine,

looking nervously from face to face, as if he feared an outbreak, not of mere violence, but something uncanny. "How very vehement you are, Denis, aren't you?"

The question lay so entirely on those conventional surfaces where there is nothing but agreement, that they might have been speaking of the weather; and it was with a sort of eagerness to remain on those levels that he continued his bright-eyed and bird-like talk.

"What was that word you used—eugenics? How very odd it sounds. I suppose it is a new word. Our marriages were always *arranged*, weren't they, John?"

John took no notice of his father. His face was fiery with drink; but the drink was not the cause of the wild glare in his eyes, or the curious deliberation with which he lifted his glass of port, held it against the light for a moment, drank and set it down.

He, too, seemed to be wrestling with an obscure fear, though he met it in another way and was able to hold it down with the iron hands of his will.

"Pretty color those peaches, aren't they?" he said gruffly. Then he laughed, and went on rapidly: "Why, Denis, she's a year younger than yourself and I'll wager you've never clapped eyes on a more—what shall I say to please you?—more lovable girl—eh? Yet you look as if you were going to an execution." He pointed to the garden. Two women, followed by a tall, slim girl, passed the window like shadows and disappeared into the blue dusk. "Now, Denis," he said almost pleadingly, "go out and make yourself charming to her."

"Yes, do, Denis. John and I have a great deal to talk about," the old man chimed in, "and you can be so very charming when you wish."

Millicent herself put an end to the hesitation of Denis by returning to the window alone and beckoning to him. Her face, as she pressed it against the pane, looked pretty enough. As Denis himself had once said, "it was quite a charming work of art for one so young."

He made his way out and his uncle turned almost fiercely to Edward Erskine.

"If he weathers the present crisis," he said, "it is just possible that he will live down the family taint. I am sure he will. But once or twice, when he was talking to-night, his eyes had that loathsome vacancy. I could have struck him across the face when his fingers began drumming on the table. He looked as if he were going to have one of his grandfather's visions. I believe he is often quite unconscious of his surroundings; but so are many other imaginative youngsters, and I don't believe he has yet begun to see things that are not there—which is—I suppose—the next step to not seeing things which *are* there."

"Don't say that, John. Don't say that," replied the other, with a sigh that seemed to shake his whole frame. "I don't like to hear you talk about it. It would be too sad! Oh, it would be too, too, tragic."

"He's a healthy lad enough; but why do you suppose he doesn't want to marry a girl like Millicent? Because he isn't in love with her? No young man ever shuddered at the idea of marriage with a really pretty and charming girl for a purely negative rea-

son of that kind. There must be someone else in the case, eh?"

John Erskine spoke as if he hoped there might be; but it was evident that another alternative lay in his mind, half strangled, but gnawing and preying upon him still.

"I wonder, I really do wonder," murmured the old man. "No doubt you are right, John, there must be someone else."

"But who can it be? You know the kind of life that has been necessary for him, up to the present. It is nobody that we know. I wonder if he is up to any pranks? He slips away almost every night to that little fir-wood by the lake. A farmer's daughter, I suppose. Of course it's useless to ask him; but it must be stopped."

John Erskine was not the man to be very particular in such matters. His attempts to wrap that dreadful half-strangled Something Else in the ludicrously small cloak of his virtue, were almost pathetic.

"Denis has always been very much fascinated by the old legend about that lake, you know, John," said the old man timidly. "It is probably merely a poetic fancy that takes him there."

"Damn the legend!" said his son. "I'd rather it were anything than that. But it must be stopped. I shall follow him if he goes there to-night. We must have no scandal during his engagement."

"No, no, you are quite right, John," quavered his father. "At all costs there must be no scandal."

"Of course, he will have his fling as we all did at his age."

"All did at his age," came the echo.

"But he'll make a fine man."

"A fine man," repeated Edward Erskine. "I think you are very fond of the boy, John"; and there was a curious note of wistfulness in the remark, as if the old man were saying that he himself would be grateful for a share in that affection.

II

"Oh, it'll be great fun," said Millicent to Denis, as they walked slowly up a long wooded vista towards the house again. "We'll have it in the *Morning Post* next week, and we'll tell the cheaper newspapers that you fell in love with me under a Chinese lantern at a charity garden-party. We ought to have our pictures on the front page of all the illustrated papers, too. I suppose you can arrange that? It's so good for the general public. Do you like being a dream, Denis? You are exactly like one at the present moment. Did you choose that tie yourself? It's very becoming. But you know the best part about our engagement is that I don't love you a bit."

"Nor do I," murmured Denis absently. "I mean——"

"I know exactly what you mean, dearest, and that makes it better still. It must be a frightful bore being really in love with people: -

'Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,
Where are you now, where are you now?'

Think of being hunted into the next world by a woman like that. I do hope—Denis, you are more

than a dream, you are looking positively ghostly—I do hope you are in love with somebody else. I wonder if you are. It would add so much interest to your silence. I have seen you disappearing towards the lake three times this week after dark. Why do you go there? Don't say it's to gloat over moonlight effects and think of me. Remember, Denis, after we're married, you must always steal away to mysterious trysts in the woods. You mustn't rob me of my first interest in you. One of these evenings I shall follow you and accidentally walk into your *tête-à-tête*. I want to see how you make love. It will give me such a hold upon you when we are married."

At last Millicent grew tired of chattering unaided. Denis escorted her to the house, but refused to accompany her within. John Erskine and his father saw them parting on the terrace before the dining-room windows. But there was a mischievous light in Millicent's eyes as she turned and saw the direction that Denis had taken.

When he was out of sight she glanced around with a chuckle and began to follow him like a cat stalking a bird.

There was very little light in the sky now, and Denis went slowly and unsuspectingly towards the lake by the fir-wood. His face was white, rapt and still, like the face of a visionary. His large dark eyes were wide open; and if his uncle could have caught a glimpse of them he might have thought that, after all, the boy had begun to see "things that were not there."

Within a few yards of the lake he paused. Here

and there, through gaps in the trees, a faint starlight fell shimmering on the water. There was a soft fluttering and ruffling of white feathers where two startled swans awoke and glided away to distant banks of violet shadow. Then he saw the slim figure of a girl stealing out of the wood to meet him. She was barefooted, and she had a wonderful dark crown of hair that, by mere outline, made her a sister of the Dryads.

Denis seemed to recognize her. She stood, a listening Daphne, straight-limbed and still, poised on a forward foot. For a moment he stayed in the shadow, to drink in her beauty.

An aura of faintly rose-tinted darkness seemed to divide her from all contact with the mottled blackness of the wood, and enshrined her within an almost invisible globe of secretly shining color. Her eyes had a light in them like the light of stars in clear dark water.

Without a word she stretched out her arms; and immediately Denis caught her by the cold hands and drew her to him.

"I have been waiting," she murmured, "waiting for you ever since the world began to be quiet again."

They went towards the lake together with their arms about each other and their hands entwined.

III

They were standing knee-deep in mist, on the brink of the lake, when Millicent came stealthily through the fringes of the wood. But those two

heard and saw only the whispers and shadows of their own world.

"I sometimes think that perhaps you are only a dream," said Denis, as their lips parted. "Why will you never tell me your name? I have no name to call you by, but my dream."

"Why does a dream vanish at daybreak?" she whispered. "Why does a faith vanish in a creed? Why does a divinity vanish in the stone of its images? I shall never tell you my name."

Then, woman-like, she breathed it into his ear.

"But nobody else must ever hear that name," she said, "or your dream will vanish too."

"No one shall ever make that common," he said passionately. "No one shall ever rob me of my religion by proving it to be true."

There was a rustle of leaves in the copse behind them, and the mocking voice of Millicent broke out into a little French song:

"La lune blanche
Luit dans les bois;
De chaque branche
Part une voix
Sous la ramée . . .
O bien-aimée."

"Why, Denis, I thought I should be able to watch you making love," she cried, as she stepped out of her concealment, "and here you are, all alone, gloating over starlight effects. My poor little romance has gone for ever." She made a pretty grimace of disappointment.

"All alone, what do you mean?" said Denis. His

voice sounded deeper than usual, as if some new force had been released in him, some hitherto suppressed emotion. "Didn't you see her, Millicent? Didn't you see her?"

"I saw nobody but yourself, Denis," she laughed, and looked at him, wondering why he was thus unwontedly jocose. Then it seemed as if a terrible thought touched her with a cold hand. A look of ignorant fear crept into her eyes. "Why, what in heaven's name is the matter?" she cried, like one that thinks to change ill news into good by questioning it sharply.

Denis stared at her without speaking. His eyes smoldered like black jewels in his gray face. He came slowly towards her with a soft cat-like tread. She stood trembling, rooted as in a nightmare, unable to cry out or flee.

Denis gripped her by the wrists. "You fool," he moaned in a low hoarse voice that came shaking from those strange and newly unsealed depths of his nature. He pointed to the water with a quivering hand. "Do you see what you have done? You have killed her. You have killed her. As soon as you came a great slimy green thing rose quietly out of the water like a monstrous devil-fish, and a hundred great slimy green arms caught her and wrapped her round and dragged her down. She hadn't even time to cry out. They dragged her down, down into darkness and ugliness and death, where all the beautiful things go as soon as your world touches them. Don't you see her heart's blood bubbling, bubbling up in the lake every time you breathe?"

The terrified girl began to lose her self-control;

and tried to extricate herself by force from his grip. "Let me go, Denis," she wailed, "please let me go."

He chuckled hideously, and began to drag her towards the brink of the lake. "We must try to save her," he said.

IV

"I shall follow him to-night," said John Erskine.

"Yes, yes," said his father. "Let us follow him now. It would be better for us to discover what he is doing than for Millicent to do so. I am not sure, but I thought I saw Millicent going down towards the lake. She looked as if she were following him too."

"Why the devil didn't you say so before?" said his hot-faced son. "I'm going to find out what is happening."

"You must let me come with you, John. I feel very uneasy to-night."

"Pshaw!" said John Erskine, and this was the nearest that either of them had come to expressing the fear that possessed them. Masses of gray cloud were flying over the sky as the two men set out through the dark garden. Edward Erskine looked strangely spirit-like, with his long white, straggling hair. Sometimes he murmured words in soft musical tones, almost as if he were estimating some secondary harmonic meanings in them.

"It is very dark. It is difficult, very difficult, to see where one is going."

John Erskine grunted impatiently, but he disliked showing more impatience than was avoidable, so he

turned the grunt into the first few staves of a popular tune.

"I often wonder," continued Edward Erskine, "whether as one gets older the frailty of one's bodily texture, so to speak, may not make one more open to whatever disturbing influences may reach one through the—er—spiritual—er—atmosphere."

John Erskine looked fiercely shamefaced, as indeed he always did when he thought that anybody was talking to him of high matters. "Dunno," he said, with a curious little laugh. "My bodily texture's dense enough, at any rate."

"Stop," cried the old man, "what was that?" He laid a thin hand on his son's arm and stood as if listening for something at a great distance. Then John Erskine, too, thought he heard it; and at last it came—a long, low wail, bestial, indescribable—and the valves of his heart closed. But he recovered himself immediately. "It was a dog howling," he cried angrily.

"Yes, of course. It was only a dog, wasn't it?"

This perpetual agreement annoyed John Erskine, as with a subtle irony. It forced him again and again to reveal the gnawings of that Something Else, forced him beyond himself, made him say things that he despised as the utterances of a weakling. He had done his best to be patient; but he turned now with a snarl of brutal self-contradiction, "Damn it! Have you ever heard a dog cry like that before?"

"No, John, I don't think I've ever heard a dog cry like that before."

The two men quickened their pace, Edward

Erskine walking in a world of his own, far aloof, though his coat-sleeve touched that of his son. Doubtless there was some truth in what he had said about the frailty of his bodily texture. That cry seemed to have opened a wide way for the night through the thin barriers; and he continued to murmur to himself words and phrases, less for their surface meaning than for those strange secondary suggestions which the quick ear can always detect in the language of deep emotion.

John Erskine was not an impressionable man, apparently, but that Something Else constantly weighed upon his mind and rendered him unwontedly sensitive. He had not attempted to follow as usual the surface meaning of his father's talk; and, perhaps for that very reason, he was caught, subconsciously, by its general drift. Because he floated without any personal effort he thought that he remained in his former mental position. There was only a dull rumor in the distance; but, if he were motionless, it mattered little whether the waters went over Niagara or not. Once or twice at a chance phrase a shiver went through him. He distinctly remembered how, in the same animal way, he had felt the chant of the pilgrims in *Tannhauser*. He actually made the comparison; but there his premonition, or his insight, or perhaps his weakness, ended.

Outwardly, he was no more than a hot-faced, well-fed Englishman, breathing of spirits. He spoke rudely and gruffly, partly out of that queer shamefastness he had, in common with most of his kind, and partly out of the real contempt that is felt

for such emotions by a worldly but strong-minded man—a character upon which he justly prided himself.

"You will be declaring that you see prophetic signs and warnings round you soon, if you go on working yourself into that frame of mind," he said. Then, as they neared the fir-wood, he gripped his father's arm and drew him into the shadow of the trees.

A lean, round-shouldered figure with a gray face was walking rapidly to and fro, like a caged animal, on the margin of the lake. Sometimes it moaned and clasped its hands. It was Denis.

They watched him for a few moments from behind a tall clump of ferns; and, as they watched, a sickle moon floated above the tree-tops and turned the lake to liquid silver.

"John," whispered his father, "what is that?" He pointed to a muslin scarf that floated near them on the water. They both stared at it in silence.

"Where is Millicent?" whispered the old man again.

"For God's sake be silent," breathed the other.

"I am afraid, John. You don't know how afraid I am."

John Erskine turned on him like a wild beast, with a mad glower in his eye. Then once more in silence they listened and watched.

Denis was lying on his face now at the brink of the lake, peering into the depths of the water.

"Come back to me, come back to me, my beautiful one," he moaned.

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John Erskine had heard enough. He emerged from his hiding place into the moonlight.

"Denis," he said, holding out both hands as if he were trying to capture a wild woodland creature.

"Denis!"

The boy screamed like a woman and leapt to his feet.

"Ah, you have heard, you have heard. You have killed her again," he cried. "Look, look, look! You can just see the great green arms drawing her down again."

"Denis," said John Erskine, still holding out his hands, and speaking with a strange tenderness.

"Don't speak, don't speak," screamed the boy. "Every time you speak her blood comes bubbling up in the lake, just as it did when Millicent spoke. Don't you see it staining the water with great clouds of roses?"

"Denis," said the other again, stealing a step nearer. "Listen to me, and I will tell you how you may save her even now."

Denis looked at him suspiciously. Then, with a sobbing laugh he caught at his uncle's hands and wrung them affectionately.

"Ah, you were always my good friend, uncle, always my best friend."

"Tell me first," said John Erskine, very quietly and gently, "is Millicent down there, too?" He pointed to the water.

"Yes," said the boy. "I killed her. She tried to get out, but,"—he leant his face to his uncle's ear and spoke in a rapid whisper, broken with queer little laughs,—"I pushed her hands away like this,

you see, whenever she got hold of the bank, and once she pulled a great clump of grass down, and once I stamped on her fingers to make her let go." He laughed again at the recollection.—"She only screamed once, uncle; and at last she got tired, and stayed down. She has been down there for a whole hour."

John Erskine's arms were round the boy, folding him against his big hammering heart. The huge man was shaking from head to foot.

"Well, we may yet save something, Denis," he said. He was staring at something he saw under the clear waters of the lake. Then he bent and kissed the boy on the forehead. Something in his action struck terror into the heart of the old man, who was still hidden in the ferns and watching every movement.

"Ah, John, John," he gasped, "what are you going to do? John, you frighten me. I beseech you, John!"

His son took no heed. "We must dive into the lake, Denis, and then perhaps we shall find her."

"Yes, oh, yes," cried the boy gleefully. "We shall find her there."

John Erskine released him. Denis immediately ran to the brink and leapt into the water with a floundering splash. John Erskine followed, with a neat dive, close to the floating scarf. He remained some time under water and came up with a burst, his face dead white and hideous.

"Denis," he whispered huskily, as he stood with his head and shoulders above water. "Denis, come here, I have found her. The boy swam chuckling

up to him, and John caught him in his arms again. Then with an awful cry of "Oh, Denis, forgive! Forgive! It's the best way," he forced the boy's head back and held him down under the lake. The struggle was short. The white-haired old man on the bank wailed aloud, dropped to his knees and writhed among the ferns like a wounded creature moaning, "Ah, ah, ah!"

Then John Erskine emerged, a tottering, corpse-like thing from the water; and the moonlight danced peacefully on the subsiding ripples.

"Come quickly," he gasped, as he raised his father to his feet. "We will go and tell them that Denis was drowned in trying to save Millicent. You understand? I saw the floating scarf and I dived. You understand? I couldn't get them out. Quick! We must go and get help."

As they drew near the house and saw the gaily lighted windows and heard a sound of music within, John Erskine reeled and clutched the old man's arm.

"Father," he whispered, and Edward Erskine had never felt so near his son as at that moment. "Help me to go through with it. I swear it is better than the only other way. Remember his grandfather."

As he spoke they paused and faced one another in the shadow of a lilac tree. Then the old man leaned forward to his son and kissed him.

VIII

THE VERY CAREFUL MAN

IN a world as remote from ours as the remotest star of the Milky Way, a battle was in progress, a battle stranger than anything dreamed by Dante, and fought by unimaginable armies of indescribable creatures. If one had fifteen senses instead of five, one might be able to paint that weird conflict between hosts that for convenience we will call the Whites and the Reds, but in the meantime it is only possible to suggest vaguely that they were moving through a gray landscape and concentrating all their forces on the capture or defense of a single gray fortress. At present, it was in the possession of the Reds, but the Whites had surrounded it in large numbers and it looked as if at any moment it might succumb. It is impossible to suggest the motives of this distant warfare, but it might be gathered from the fury of both parties that almost incalculable results were at stake. The remoteness of the war was not exactly a question of space, except that it took place in a field almost invisible to the most powerful microscopes, a minute section of the brain of Joshua Smart, the taxi-driver.

To drive a hansom cab through the streets of London for twenty years, without acquiring asthma, rheumatism, or a red nose, may be reckoned a remarkable achievement. The character and consti-

tution that had made it possible in his own case were the explanation, perhaps, of the remarkable ease with which Joshua Smart adjusted himself to new conditions. He had appeared in Piccadilly as the driver of a taxi-cab, when the great change came, almost before the British public had made up its mind about the new method of transportation. He was as fine a specimen of the London cabby as you could find anywhere in the city, and he carried the quick Cockney wit of the old tradition into the new.

He was quite unaware of the battle for world-power that was proceeding a quarter of an inch beneath his skull. If he had been examined by a super-doctor, equipped with all the scientific apparatus of the future (let us say of the thirty-first century), there might have been discovered a minute discoloration, quite invisible to the naked eye, around a single tiny cell in his brain. It might have been observed, on a fine Christmas morning of the year 19—, that this discoloration had shrunk a little, so that it was now almost invisible to the microscope; but not even the wisest of the super-doctors would have been able to say with certainty whether this meant that the Whites or the Reds were winning their world war.

Joshua Smart was not in the least disturbed by it. Not even in his dreams did he feel the faintest sensation of it. It affected himself and his family no more than the evaporation of a dewdrop in the planet Venus; and perhaps considerably less than the grounds in the coffee of Mr. Charles Moulton, the Government official, who lived at Putney, not far from the house that was once occupied by Swinburne.

Mr. Charles Moulton was a very careful man. He disliked every kind of carelessness, from that which ends in coffee grounds to that which ends in sickness and death. He ate carefully. He drank carefully. He crossed the streets carefully. He saved his money carefully, and he spent it very carefully indeed. If he caught cold, he went to bed carefully; and in the immediately preceding years, whenever there had been an air-raid, he had even caught cold carefully, by spending the night in a cellar. In every dilemma, he carefully chose the smaller of two evils. In the early days of the war he had hoarded food so carefully that he had to lie with considerable care in order to escape prosecution. But he had pulled through, after several of those hairbreadth escapes which always attend upon the extremely careful.

He had never married; because, as he had proved very completely to the woman who once thought she loved him, no reasonably careful man could afford to take the risks of domesticity on the salary of a Government official. Certain pangs of remorse had attacked him in later life when he had discovered from the statistics of the insurance companies that married men usually outlive bachelors. But he decided that this must be due almost entirely to the fact that their wives made them keep early hours, and he therefore created an imaginary ogre in the house as a check upon his own habits.

Living in this way, he had been able to save a considerable portion of his salary and he was now, at the age of fifty, quite a well-to-do man. For five years, after his discovery of the idea that railways

and tubes were simply forcing-houses for the multitudinous microbes of London, he had gone to Whitehall and back in his own car, driven by an exceedingly careful chauffeur. Recently, however, he had received two severe shocks through the deaths of two acquaintances in motor accidents. They also had been driven very carefully; but, as a most depressing policeman pointed out to him, "it isn't what you do, it's what the other feller does that's the danger. What's the good of driving careful round corners, when there may be an 'undred and fifty reckless drivers coming round the wrong side of the road to meet you?"

Mr. Moulton pondered over that last sentence in the small hours of the morning; and, on the very next day, after a slight mishap to his own car, he decided to sell it and to indulge for the future in a slow but healthy pedestrianism for a great part of his journey.

Of course he had been vaccinated every four years and inoculated against most of the known diseases. It really seemed as if he had eliminated almost all the risks of a premature demise.

On the Christmas morning aforesaid, it was the carelessness of others that had spoiled Mr. Moulton's coffee; and it was in consequence of this that he took only one cup, and so left his house for his constitutional walk at least five minutes earlier than he had intended. Otherwise, he would not have entered into this tale.

He was well on his way to the river, greatly exhilarated by his walk and already anticipating his lunch, when he arrived at a broad junction of streets

which was always lively with traffic, even on Christmas Day. He stood on the pavement waiting, with his usual care, till the right moment should arrive for the crossing. A long string of taxi-cabs was coming down the main street from the left, and he waited until the policeman held up his hand and stopped them. An electric tram which was going in the same direction as himself then ran slowly across the main street, and stopped there, thus fortunately reinforcing the mere command of the policeman and making it quite certain that the traffic could not be resumed until Mr. Moulton had passed over in safety to the other side. The word "fortunately" is used (although it was the kind of good luck that one can always—sooner or later—secure by patience) because it happened fairly soon.

Twenty yards up the street to the left there was one taxi-cab that had not quite come to rest. It was crawling very slowly past the motionless string of the other vehicles. The driver evidently intended to steal a few yards before halting. It could obviously be only a very few yards as the policeman's eye was already fixed upon the driver, and in any case the tram-car presented a solid rampart for the moment.

So Mr. Charles Moulton began to walk delicately across the street protected by the police, and backed up by that solid material barrier. He walked close to the side of the tram. Nothing could have run into him without running into it; and it was packed with people. On the other side of him the long line of taxi-cabs lay patiently ticking and throbbing; and crawling slowly down at their side came Joshua

Smart, smiling blandly at his own thoughts. There was an old lady in his taxi-cab, a white-haired old lady with an incredible number of Christmas parcels. She, too, was smiling at her own thoughts. She was quite pleased at the intelligence of her driver in getting ahead of that tiresome line of traffic, and she smiled ingratiatingly at the policeman up to the very moment when Joshua Smart pulled a lever which she supposed was the preliminary to stopping altogether. As a matter of fact, at that very moment, the little gray fortress in Joshua Smart's brain had been captured by the wrong army. The old lady's smile stopped with a jerk, and changed to a gasp of horror. In the same instant the smile of Joshua Smart broadened to its fullest extent. The careful peripatetics of Mr. Moulton had evidently appealed to something elemental in Joshua Smart; for when that essentially secure, polite, and astonishingly neat official was in a direct line between the old lady and the tram-car, Joshua Smart gave one terrific whoop of laughter, opened the throttle to its widest extent, drove his machine full tilt down the hill, and crashed everything, Mr. Moulton, and himself, and the taxi-cab, and the old lady, in one ghastly splintering smash, head first into the tram-car and through its windows.

The old lady was saved, partly by her Christmas parcels. Joshua Smart resumed his laughter in a lunatic asylum; for nobody, yet, could discover or remedy that slight discoloration of a minute section of his brain.

But Mr. Moulton had been careful for the last time in his life.

IX

COURT-MARTIAL

"DADDEE! Daddee-ee!" The voice of a small boy, alone in the dark and frightened, wailed from an upper room of number six, Acacia Villas.

"All right, Pickles, all right! Daddy's coming," cried Mr. George Mason cheerfully, as he put down his evening paper and dashed upstairs.

Mrs. Mason, a young woman with a pretty up-turned nose, large dark eyes, and only the shadowy beginnings of the harassed look that comes eventually to all who live in Acacia-land, laid her sewing down and looked at the fire. She smiled faintly as she listened to the two voices overhead. George was really almost as excitable as the small boy.

She could not distinguish the words of the nursery-rhyme with which he was soothing the frightened child, but his foot beat the time on the floor above like a muffled drum-tap, and she tried to identify the tune by counting,

"One, two, three; and a one, two, three;
And a one, two; one, two, three."

"Say it again, Daddee," piped the clear treble of Pickles.

"Time—asleep." Only the emphasized words of the tenor reply reached the listener below.

The small voice expostulated. There was an instant surrender. "George is so weak," thought his wife, smiling again, while the drum-taps began more loudly—as if they had drawn nearer; and the thin tenor rose, quite clearly now, lilting:—

"Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he.
He called for his pipe, and he called for his bowl,
And he called for his fiddlers three."

Then there was a brief duet of laughter, the sound of a kiss, a well-pleased "good-night" from Pickles, a creak on the stairs, and George re-entered the sitting-room.

"Dreaming again," he said. "It was a Man with Long Thin Legs this time. He was as thin as a telegraph pole, three times as tall as the house, and he tried to get in by pushing his legs through the bedroom windows. Nasty spidery legs they were, too. I've put a night-light in a basin for him now. Pickles never dreams if he knows the light's there, which proves that it isn't indigestion."

"It's very extravagant. We're burning a great many night-lights, George."

"Yes, I know, and personally I should prefer the dark to shadows on a lighted wall. But Pickles doesn't think so, and I know what a comfort it used to be to myself."

His wife smiled at him affectionately, as he sat on a cushion at her feet.

"Were you just as troublesome, George?"

"Oh, worse, heaps worse! People don't under-

stand what agonies nervous children can suffer. That's why I always hop upstairs at once when Pickles begins to holler. You see one might just arrive in the nick of time to save him from one of those ghastly things that live in Nightmareland. The poor little chap was trembling all over just now. He's a bundle of nerves. Let's hope he'll outgrow them."

"Dr. Morrison says it's just as much a child's illness as measles."

"Yes. Only nobody really knows when you've got it, so you don't get looked after properly. I'm afraid Pickles inherited some of his troubles from me. I know that I was made worse by sheer foolishness when I was a kid. Good Lord, Ellen, the earliest recollection of my life is a big dark garden behind a school-house, a sort of kindergarten it must have been. I remember an older boy making me come with him to the end of it, and telling me to look into the summer house, where he said there was a ghost. As soon as I did it, he pushed me inside, locked the door behind me, and left me there alone in the pitch dark. Then something, I thought it was the ghost, clutched me by the hair—I had long curls then—lifted me off my feet and dropped me on the floor. I was found lying there half an hour afterwards in a dead faint; but my recollection was that I had been tortured for about a century. Schoolboys can be little devils. It sounds very silly, but I'd rather live a hundred years in hell, I think, than be asked to become a child and go through that experience again."

His wife touched his forehead.

"Why, your forehead's quite damp even now," she said.

"Is it? Quite likely. I honestly believe it affected me for years afterwards, and made my nerves shaky in all sorts of unexpected ways. I never quite knew when they were going to let me down. I remember, when I was a boy of about fourteen, getting halfway up a cliff, then looking down and losing my nerve so completely that I couldn't move in any direction. I stayed there for about three hours, expecting to slip and be killed at any moment. A sailor climbed up at last and helped me down again. It's extraordinary; but I still dream about it."

He resumed his seat on the other side of the fire and picked up his newspaper.

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Mr. and Mrs. Mason had always looked upon wars as something entirely outside the life of respectable people who lived in cities like London. Wars were a matter for history-books; and "*They*," the mysterious *They*, who ruled the country and ordained that there should be postmen, policemen, and paved streets, would of course carry on all necessary wars elsewhere, and end them whenever *They* pleased.

"I see *They* have sent an Expeditionary Force; I see *They* say it will last three years," Mr. Mason would remark; and it was quite likely that his wife would reply: "I see *They* are wearing shorter skirts this winter."

On one occasion, when he had read out from the evening paper an account of the casualties during a disastrous retreat, she had said, without a single

pause to take breath, "It's terrible, isn't it? I can smell scorched leather! Your slippers are too near the fire, dear. Are you going to hear Pickles say his prayers to-night, or shall I?"

But this detachment did not in the least mean that either of them was callous, or even unimaginative. Nature has provided that all men shall be more seriously disturbed by a broken finger in their own household than by the slaughter of a million men in a far off country. The great events of the world had never troubled Mr. and Mrs. Mason in the past. Distance is sometimes a question of modesty rather than of mileage. They looked at historical events, even in their own day, as one looks at constellations on a clear night. It never occurred to them that those remote splendors and terrors could affect their own insignificant lives.

Then came the day when Dawkins and Son began to make it plain that "they didn't want to lose anyone, but they thought that everyone ought to go." It was a little startling, not so much because of the gravity of the situation, as because Mr. George Mason, who was one of their clerks, had never looked at it in that light. Of course he knew that *They* wanted "the men." Hitherto, he had belonged to neither party. But he was perhaps the most sensitive of the employees of Messrs. Dawkins; and, on the evening of that same day, after a serious talk with his wife, he went "to hear the speeches"—this was all that they admitted to themselves—at a local recruiting meeting. His wife accompanied him. There was a very jovial Member of Parliament on the platform and, as it was in

December, 1914, before the tragedy had struck very deep, he was able to draw a laugh, occasionally, from Ellen Mason. His peroration was in terms of football.

"Now, come along, my boys!" he cried. "Let's put up a good team here to-night, and see if we can't help to send the Kaiser's team back to Germany, with a score of six goals to nothing against them!"

- The speaker was aided by a burly soldier, to whom he sometimes alluded as Sergeant Pym. This man, who looked extraordinarily like Bismarck in the face, except that there was a depth of amiability in his eyes, the eyes of a faithful mastiff, moved about the hall, accosting likely youths, and seldom failing to enlist them. At last, he stood in front of George Mason and smiled down at him ingratiatingly.

Mr. Mason's undernourished physique hardly suggested a warlike disposition. He stood about five feet four inches in his socks. He had the round shoulders and narrow chest of a confirmed desk-worker; and he had to be very careful about catching cold. Twice a day, also, immediately after meals, he took a mysterious white globule, said to contain iron. He was thirty-five years of age, and his prematurely lined face had an anæmic expression which, in the days of their courtship, Mrs. Mason had associated with a hungry angel, an imitation of Burne-Jones, in a certain church window. She had gazed at it during many a sermon and a framed photograph of it still hung in her bedroom; but the globules and other domestic details had quietly dis-

sociated it from her husband. Her affection for him was far more real now; but she knew that he was neither an angel nor a viking. Sergeant Pym apparently thought otherwise.

"You're just the young fellow I've been looking for," he said. "'Arf a dozen more like you, and we shall 'ave the war over before Christmas. There's a good lot 'ere to-night, every one of 'em joinin' up to do his bit for Old England, except that funny little blighter under the platform there, and 'e's got an 'are-lip, and no roof to 'is mouth, so I couldn't really say whether 'e wanted to join up, or whether 'e was using bad language."

"Shall I join up, Ellen?" said Mason. "I'd better do it now, I think. Dawkins and Son will make up the salary to you now, and keep my place open till after the war. They mightn't be so ready to do it if I were to wait. What do you think?"

"I'm sure I don't know, George. It's for you to decide. Of course, I don't think you're really strong. You mightn't be able to stand the hardships."

"'Ardships? Don't you worry about 'ardships," said Sergeant Pym. "Nobody in this country is going to get anything to eat except the men in the Army. You won't know yer 'usband when 'e's been in the Army a few months. Why, it's the best 'ealth resort in the world. Look at me! I was twenty years in the Marines before I got transferred to the Army; and I've seen active service all over the world, from Greenland's Icy Mountains to Injia's Coral Strand, same as the 'ymn says. When I was your 'usband's age you could 'ave knocked me down with a feather, and now, look at me! Wot's the

reason the taxes are going up all the time? Why, because of all the 'earty old soldiers the country 'as to pension. Look at all them old boys in Chelsea, going on to ninety, some of 'em, all of 'em eating 'earty, drinking 'earty, smoking 'earty, and swearing—'earty, and not one of 'em that 'asn't a sweet'eart for every day in the week."

Sergeant Pym carried his point.

The experiences of the next few months were like a wild incomprehensible dream to millions of men and women, and not least among them to George Mason and his wife. In July, 1914, if anyone had told these two that, within a very few months, they would be parted, and that the city clerk would be a private in the Downshires, learning how to plunge a bayonet into the human body, they would have attributed the prophecy to drink or lunacy. Yet this thing had happened and, in a very few months, George Mason found himself in France, surrounded by an extraordinary pageantry of movement that recalled vaguely what he had read in the history-books about the trekking of whole nations from one continent to another. It hardly suggested warfare. It was as if whole races had struck their tents, and were migrating to new camping-grounds beyond the horizon. Always he seemed to be moving in a dream-world. The letters that he wrote to his wife, at first, were full of the new things that he discovered in France. It was as new a country to him as America to Columbus; and walking about over a country that hitherto had been a part of his land of story-books did not make it more real. It merely added to the dream-like quality of his life.

He was perhaps quietly relieved to find that victories depended on the marching up and down of soldiers at a considerable distance from the ferocious hand-to-hand contests that he had pictured. But, occasionally, a feeling of impatience would overtake him that the movement could only proceed at a foot-pace. The streams of motor-lorries flowing in the direction of the guns, or returning empty, appeared to be adapting themselves to the pace of the dusty men on foot. He was as homesick as a school-boy in his first term. His chief desire, he wrote, was to get the whole thing over, and "to settle down in the old routine," by which he meant his daily round between Acacia Villas and the city. He began to survey the future with despondency, as one contemplates a very long railway journey, with many stops at wayside stations; and in this case, the train would obviously take many months, perhaps years, before it arrived at its destination.

This comparison was constantly in his mind. One of the most leisurely things he had ever seen was the spectacle of some big guns in action. It reminded him of shunting operations at a railway junction. There was the same leisurely waving of signals, though in this case the signalers were aided by aëroplanes. But the whole business was on too large a scale for the hurry which his soul desired. The British Empire could hardly be expected to move with the rapidity of Mexican raiders. Men in their shirt-sleeves strolled about carrying buckets. Occasionally there was a quick stab of flame from a hidden gun-pit, an explosion which shook the ground

under his feet, and jarred his bones. As for the alleged, but always unseen enemy, Private Mason began to accept that constant thunderstorm of artillery on the horizon, and even the sound of shells traveling overhead like invisible express trains, as a part of the routine of Nature; for, although he had been caught up by the military machine, he was moving, not upon a field of war, but in a world of confused dreams.

- He hardly realized this phantasmagoric quality of his life until he found himself—one might almost say awoke and found himself a prisoner, not of the enemy, but of his own countrymen. He was charged with an offense that had no legal existence in civil life; but, in the Army, was a serious crime and punishable with death.

Although he had been a volunteer, and ready to do everything in his power to help his country, some obscure nerve had given way at a critical moment. He had tried to escape. He was charged with desertion, and the motive attributed to him was cowardice.

On a certain night, three weeks after the court-martial, he sat on an old packing-case in the barn where he was imprisoned, trying to write a letter of explanation to his wife by the light of a dim oil-lamp. In the main farm-building, where the officers were billeted, across a wide yard, somebody was pounding a piano, and the voices of half a dozen young men rose in one of the latest songs of the Army. It was a still night, and the prisoner heard every syllable of the solo:

"Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
A merry old soul was he.
He called for his pipe and he called for his bowl,
And he called for his corporals three."

Then, with a tremendous clatter and banging—
what children they all were!—the voices rang out in
chorus:

"'Toot, tiddly-oot, tiddly-oot,' said the trumpeters,
'Beer—beer—beer—beer—beer,' said the corporals,

Oh,
There's none so rare
They can compare
With the boys of the British Arm-ee."

In the pause of silence at the end of the chorus,
the prisoner heard the sentry tramping in front of
the barn, and grounding his rifle as he halted on the
threshold.

Private Mason gave up the effort to write his
letter. He did not yet know enough of what was
happening to be able to collect his thoughts. He did
not know his sentence; for it had not been pro-
nounced in court. He had been found guilty of
something, or he would have been released; but he
did not yet know whether the penalty would be
death or a lighter sentence. His general impression
was that the charge of cowardice had been sustained,
so that he could hardly be let off lightly as a mere
"absentee without leave." He had been told that
the unknown sentence would be "promulgated" to
him by the A.P.M. after its confirmation by head-
quarters. Even now it was difficult for him to

realize the possibility that any Englishman who had volunteered (least of all, an Englishman who had traveled by season-ticket to the city so regularly in peacetime, and had a wife and child at home) could be shot in cold blood by his own countrymen. If he had failed in his duty, he had at least done his best. He had at least volunteered—that was his recurrent thought—and there were others who had not attempted to do as much. He remembered one clerk at the office who had grinned at him for a fool, and was still traveling up and down by season-ticket. The whole thing seemed so illogical. There were moments when he almost doubted his own identity, moments when it seemed almost as mysterious as a new birth or a re-incarnation to find himself imprisoned and awaiting this judgment. There had been an odd implacability about all the proceedings, a ruthlessness as impersonal, and doubtless as just, as the march of fate. It was exactly as if he had unwittingly broken a great law of Nature and the inevitable result were approaching.

He tried to remember all that had happened; and, as he groped back into the wild blood-shot light of the hour that had tested him and found him wanting, he could not remember anything of which he was really ashamed. He had been guilty of certain feelings that are counted as virtues in civil life. They had taken him by surprise, at the wrong moment, and carried him away in something like a panic of compassion, over what seemed to be a useless sacrifice. It had been a trying day for the nerves in any case. His company had been hurried up to relieve another lot at an awkward point. They had

received orders that nothing was to delay them on the way. In the dusk of the early evening, they passed a man who had slipped into the mud of a shell-hole, up to his throat, and was slowly sinking. A rope and a plank might have saved him, but the orders were definite. There could be no delay. They passed on at the double. Perhaps it was the cries of the drowning man when he saw that he was going to be abandoned, that snapped some obscure nerve in George Mason's brain, and made him forget that he was a private soldier.

"Good God!" he cried to the company at large. "Aren't we going to do anything to help that man?"

A corporal who had been drinking brandy all day to blunt his own sensations, at once gave him the rough side of his tongue, pointing out that rear-guard philanthropists would find even more work in the front-line if they wanted it.

The incident was mentioned in his defense at the court-martial. He thought it was evidence of a state of mind not altogether disgraceful to himself; but, to his surprise, it seemed to tell against him. To justify or explain himself, a complete picture of all that followed would have been necessary. He could not give it to the court; but he remembered it all. He remembered his immediate response to military discipline, after his outburst; and also how the face of the drowning man—that screaming white blur under the steel hat—haunted him, as he went forward with the rest. It haunted him, even when they came under fire, a few minutes later, in a region of wrecked and abandoned trenches, dotted obscurely with the dead and dying of their predecessors.

He remembered how dark it grew. He lived through it all again. The guns from east to west incessantly gave tongue, like a crouching pack of gigantic hounds. The men scattered a little as they groped and stumbled forward towards that steady baying. Occasionally, he caught sight of red gleams and flashes ahead of him, a green rocket, the swinging sword of a searchlight. Sometimes, when the thunder of the guns crashed in a single peal the earth shook and the water leapt in the shell-holes, like waves in a choppy sea. Then something happened to the dark figure on his right—something grotesquely horrible. The man plunged towards him with arms outspread. His face looked strangely misshapen in the gloom, the face of a gargoyle, with mouth wide open, spouting a dark jet of blood. He lurched against Mason, spattering him from head to foot. His first impulse was to curse and strike at the hideous thing. Then, as it staggered past him into the night, the swift revolt from his own impulse seemed—for one dreadful moment—to rouse him from the long dream of the last few months like the shock of ice-cold water.

He saw the other men, moving obscurely ahead of him, dark patches against the red flares on the horizon. The moment's delay had left him some twenty paces behind. His disciplined body started forward, mechanically, to overtake them; but a revolution had taken place in his mind; and, perhaps because his mind had ceased to guide, he stumbled over a broken parapet and fell headlong into the dark cavity beyond. It was half a trench and half a grave. His hands and feet went sprawling among

the evil-smelling rags and bones that had once been cheered along the streets of London and Paris and Berlin. It was not easy to distinguish between them now.

He scrambled to his feet and stood there, shaking uncontrollably from head to foot. He was not conscious of fear for his own sake; but, rightly or wrongly, he seemed to have become appallingly conscious of the vast insanity of the whole horrible business.

He stood there in the darkness, a little city clerk, in the throes of a brain-storm. He was vaguely aware that every moment of his delay added to the risk of his being punished or even shot. But he felt as helpless as the child in the dark garden when the ghost clutched him by the hair. For one dreadful moment he seemed to possess an extraordinary clearness of vision, going right back into the past, where the maneuvers of smug statesmen had prepared this hell. He saw, in a single tempestuous flash, as a man sees a landscape by lightning, the sentimental posters at home, the hero setting out with a vague promise of unlimited love on his return, and a shilling a day in the meantime. By the same flash he saw those other men at home, striking, and striking at the Army for five times the wage that he was allowed for his own wife and child. Had he been right to leave them? What else could he have done? By the same flash, he saw politicians preaching self-sacrifice, drawing large salaries and dining at extravagant night-clubs. Now, at this very moment, he could see them setting out in their luxurious limousines and puffing their fat cigars. By the same

flash—for all these things came to him simultaneously, not in a series of reasoned thoughts—he saw the obscure soldier, left to drown in the mud on the grounds of military necessity, the very grounds that had made the enemy hateful. He flung his rifle away from him with an oath, dropped on his knees, and gripped the stiff arms of the thing at his feet, the thing that had once been a man. He shook them hysterically, till the skull rattled loose among the empty shell-cases.

“What do *you* think about it, old bird?” he cried.

Looking back upon this moment, he hardly knew whether his behavior was evidence of abject cowardice, nervous exhaustion, or temporary insanity. He didn't know how to distinguish between those things, in circumstances of that kind. He only knew that if a politician at home had broken down under a much slighter stress, as politicians sometimes did, even in wartime, he would have been sent to a nursing home. It must be understood that there was no argument in all this. He did not reason or think. He merely groped for meanings in the dark, and felt that he was in the clutches of an enormous machine. His hysterical fit had lasted only a few seconds when, by the brilliant green light of a star-shell, he saw himself, his hands, his tunic, still red from their recent spattering. He scrambled to his feet, saying over and over again, as if to prevent any further thought, “Oh, the wickedness of it, the wickedness of it!”

Then his eyes caught a glimpse of a coil of rope among the rubbish in the trench. His mental riot settled down at once into a single steady thought.

He was going to try and help the poor devil in the shell-hole. There was still a chance of saving him, for he had been sinking very slowly. He had probably taken hours to sink up to his throat. If so, he had died a hundred deaths, and seen himself abandoned a score of times.

To save this man was the one clear-cut idea that presented itself to Private Mason. All other duties were as dark and confused as the desolate region, lit with red flares, into which his comrades had disappeared. But even while he was hurriedly picking up the rope, he was vaguely conscious of a still deeper unformulated decision. He was not only exchanging his rifle for a life-saving apparatus, he was also going to try to escape, to escape from the machine. He did not consider penalties. He concentrated all his thoughts on the task that lay nearest him, and hunted along the fire-step for a loose plank. He soon found what he wanted, crawled out of the trench and, stooping low, began to retrace his path as quickly as he could.

It was a very black night, and he had almost given up all hope of finding the shell-hole, when another burst of green stars overhead showed him that he was on the point of plunging into it. There was something in the middle that looked like a tortoise resting on the mud. It was the steel hat, under which the head was still visible, though it had sunk so far that the nostrils must have been already covered. Mason laid the plank along the soft surface of the mud, lay down on it full length, and wriggled his way out carefully. The plank sunk about an inch beneath his weight. He didn't think

that it would sink very far; but he was glad, afterwards, to feel that he had been running some risk. The light died out of the sky, and he was left in pitch darkness at the very moment when his hands began to scrape the mud away from the cold face. The nostrils were clogged with mud. He could feel this with his fingers. The mouth was open and full of mud. The head hung lifelessly as he cleared a small space round it. He felt certain that the man was dead, but he wanted the light again to make sure. In the meantime, he tried to get an end of the rope under the submerged arm-pits; and, in the effort to get it completely round the body, he tilted the plank to one side and rolled over into the sucking softness of the mud. He felt it laying hold of the whole length of his body, and gripping him caressingly, like the soft lips of a gigantic black leech. Only the fact that he was lying at full length, and had his hands upon the rope, saved him. Even then, it was only with great difficulty that he was able to haul himself, inch by inch, back to the plank. He lay there trembling, for a few moments, sweating like an exhausted runner, and praying for the light. It came, not from a star-shell now, but from an enemy searchlight that dropped from the sky and began to sweep the level plain. For a dozen seconds it paused and lay right across the shell-hole, in a blinding tunnel of light that showed all the porridge-like clots of the mud, the slight crow's-feet round the staring eyes of the drowned man, and the enlarged pores, like black pinholes, in the fleshy part of his nose. The condition of the mouth and nostrils left no doubt that he was dead. The light shut

off, leaving a darkness blacker than before; and Mason cautiously wriggled himself backwards along the plank which, by that time, was about three inches below the surface.

As soon as he reached firm ground, he set off in a southerly direction, steering by the stars, as he had learned during his military training. He had no definite plan at present, except to get away from the sound of the guns, and escape from the military machine, escape from the whole inhuman Juggernaut.

His recollections of the next few weeks were almost as dream-like as those of the earlier days. He remembered sleeping in fields by day, and tramping by night, with the fear of detection dogging him like his own shadow along the poplar-bordered roads. On every road and by-road, even in the dead of night, he met those endless trains of lorries carrying troops and supplies to the north. In narrow country lanes they would lumber down upon him like battleships, clear-cut in moonlight or shadowy and vast in mist and rain. At first, he would shrink into ditches and under hedges, to avoid the attention of the drivers or the men that plodded beside them. After a time he realized that there were too many millions of soldiers in France for him to be noticeable and that those other millions, of whose affairs he knew nothing, were not likely to trouble themselves about his own. For all that they knew, the little figure in khaki, slipping through the darkness of those country roads, might have been engaged in one of a thousand possible tasks for the troops in the neighborhood. He realized, from his own

former experience, that the men in the war zone were acquainted with only their own immediate surroundings, a circle about four hundred yards in diameter.

One night, when he was very hungry, he entered a wayside camp of Canadian troops and, in return for his own rations, helped the cooks with the evening meal. Nobody troubled in the least about his antecedents. They took it for granted that he was on his way to Dunkirk, which was only a few miles distant. His experience on this occasion emboldened him to ask for a lift on a motor-lorry which took a number of Canadians into the city on the next morning. It was probably his safest course. The driver had to show his pass once or twice, but it seemed to cover all the men in the lorry, including Private Mason. There was less chance of his being noticed in those crowded streets than anywhere else; and, on his arrival, he felt all the joy of a city-dweller returning to his beloved crowds. The last few months had taught him how to find sleeping quarters in sheds and outhouses and, occasionally, even in a bed.

He had a certain amount of money in hand; and, on his second day in Dunkirk, he began to earn a little from easy-going colonials. He kept a special look-out for motor cars in difficulties; but there were many other occasions, in that chaos of bewildered strangers, when a readiness to help proved to be remunerative.

There seemed to be no reason why he should not live in this way for as long as he pleased. He could see no prospect of anything better; though,

once or twice, stimulated by a moving-picture show, he formed wild projects of getting back to England. They soon faded in the difficulties of the daylight. His only real hope was the ever-receding one that the war might end as unexpectedly as it had begun. In the meantime, he would probably be recorded among the missing. He might just as easily have been killed as his right-hand neighbor. But it worried him to think of the suffering that the report might give to his wife. This difficulty had not occurred to him before. It worried him so much that he did a very foolish thing; and, once again, he was imperiled by what was best in him. He wrote a very carefully worded letter to indicate that he was quite happy and well in spite of anything that his wife might hear. He was alert enough to address it to one of his wife's relations, and to sign it with a nickname by which he was sometimes called—"Pickles Senior." He was even alert enough to make a long day's tramp out of Dunkirk to post it, but he had not imagination enough to grasp the full size and character of the machine that he was challenging.

A little later he attempted to send some money home, in the same way, but without giving any clue to the sender. It was really very easy to earn money in Dunkirk. Once, a great windfall came to him. He helped to change a tire on a car containing four newspaper correspondents, each of whom tipped him so handsomely (in a kind of professional rivalry over the proper treatment of the British soldier) that he was relieved of financial anxiety for the next

fortnight, and able to save his other earnings. But the interesting part of the incident was that, while he was working at the tire, he saw a staff officer of gigantic build striding up the road. His face was so startlingly familiar that Private Mason thrust his own under the car. The conversation of the correspondents over his head enlightened him.

"There's old Pym," said one of them. "He grows more like Bismarck every day. Did you ever hear how he got his red hat? Why, it's one of the illuminating parables of this war. At one time he was a recruiting-sergeant, getting a minimum of half-a-crown on every new recruit and ten bob on every guardsman. He must have been pretty successful, too. They say he cleared a couple of thousand pounds at it. Then he was put on to a quartermaster's job in a certain district where he had to deal directly with the contractors. Now Pym had always a profound prejudice against contractors. He shared the pretty sound belief that many of them made huge fortunes out of soldiers' lives; and he thought that, if you shoot a wretched sentry for falling asleep, you ought to be logical enough to shoot every contractor at sight. Unfortunately, in this case, Pym was up against some perfectly honest men. Naturally, in the hurry of war, their goods weren't always flawless, and this confirmed Pym in his worst conclusions. Every time they made a proposition to him, he used to look upon it as a suggestion that he should open his mouth and shut his eyes. He used to sit there in his office, humming from morning to night:

‘‘Oh, what a happy land is England!’’

‘‘He never hummed anything else or said anything else. He simply sat there, letting perfectly good business break against his honest bulk like waves against a block of concrete. One day, he saw a consignment of boots coming in. He picked one up and looked at it. ‘Wot’s this?’ he said. ‘Take ’em all back at once, and tell the contractor ’e can ’ave ’em served up as scrambled eggs for ’is breakfast. I’m not goin’ to ’ave boots like that served out to *my* men.’ With that he took the damned boot in both hands and—he’s a fifteen horsepower man—tore it in half like a bit of brown paper. The next morning the contractor and all the little tin gods asked Pym to come and discuss the matter with them. ‘What’s all this fuss about the boots, Pym?’ they said. ‘We’ve got a pair of them here, and we’ve been examining them all the morning. They look like first-class goods to us.’

‘‘Of course,’ said old Pym, ‘if you go about picking and choosing, I shouldn’t wonder if you’d find a pearl necklace. Let’s ’ave some more of ’em sent up.’

‘‘The little tin gods looked annoyed, but Pym was not to be denied, and sent down for another half ton of the boots.

‘‘He grabbed one as soon as they arrived. ‘Why, blimey!’ he bellowed, ‘ere’s another of ’em’ (rip-rip), ‘and another’ (rip-rip), ‘and another’ (rip-rip). And every time he picked up a boot he tore it in half and threw it on the table under the contractor’s indignantly jibbing nose which, Pym swears,

grew not only livid, but hooked, with guilt and fear.

"Well, of course, a fifteen horsepower man isn't a fair test. But it was very awkward. Pym was too good a man to be kicked downstairs, so they had to kick him up. The only way they could get rid of him was to go behind his back, get him a commission in the Downshires, and have him sent out to France. And now he's an A. P. M. of his old division, and he wears a red hat; but there's no moral, because the only quartermaster capable of dealing with the other kind of contractor has been lost through beginning at the honest end."

It interested Private Mason greatly to know that his old acquaintance had been acquired by what might be called his own old division. But it was a little startling, too, and suggested unpleasant possibilities of recognition, even amongst those crowded thoroughfares. For the next few days he spent many hours in what he felt to be his surest sanctuary, the moving-picture theaters. Those dark, crowded rooms, where the pianos tinkled so rapturously at the wrong moment, and the world and its emotions traveled past him on the screen, were curiously symbolical of his whole, dream-like state. They were his Arabian nights, though he felt vaguely that, if ever the magic river should cease to flow, the danger would be to himself and not to the makers of his entertainment. Yet, as the days went by, he forgot his fears again, and the pictures blended almost imperceptibly into the pageantry of those cosmopolitan streets. He would emerge from the darkness of the theater into the brilliance of the sunlit town, with dazed eyes, wondering at the many-colored

throng: the chattering Frenchwomen; the French and Belgian soldiers; the swarthy Algerian troops; the Spahi with his red fez, blue zouaves, baggy red breeches, and flowing red cloak; the Turco with flashing teeth and dirty white burnous; the brown-turbaned Indians; the newspaper correspondents, talking English and French in all the accents of the world, from Petrograd to Chicago; the British officers with their red and green tabs and their heavy spurred boots; the Chinese coolies with their slack walk and lolling heads; and it all seemed merely another external scene of the moving-picture which he had been watching within.

Once, he stood before a shop-window, staring at a picture of the Madonna with the Child, on the basilica at Albert. Strange legends had clustered about that stricken figure, half dislodged from its high place by German bombardments, and leaning forward over the crowd so precariously. People said it would not fall until the Germans had been defeated. The tears came into his eyes as he looked at it, for he had imagination enough to form a legend of his own. He thought of the precarious position of Ellen and Pickles.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said a voice approaching him. A whiff of brandy blew into his face. A hand touched his arm. He turned and saw, with the kind of absurd shock that an absent-minded pedestrian feels when he runs into a lamp-post, the fiery red face of the corporal who—four weeks ago—had expressed himself so forcibly on "rear-guard philanthropists."

Private Mason was under arrest.

His chief sensation during the court-martial had been that he was now once more in the clutches of the vast machine from which he had been trying to escape. The proceedings had been eminently fair from the military point of view, as fair as Nature herself when she drowns a child for tumbling into a river. But the very fact that it was all so impersonal and impartial was a kind of indifference, almost a kind of injustice. The officers who composed the court were all very young men, and they had never really understood the case. They saw a great many things on the surface, but they had never gone one inch beneath. They were like men who should try to pluck the secret out of *Hamlet* by debating a printer's error on the title-page.

All through the trial, he was conscious that everyone was doing his best to be fair and to give him every chance of acquittal, if he could only somehow prove that he had lived up to a standard that had never been his own. He could not even express this idea, of course in his defense. He merely became eloquent in describing his motives, and the description was quite enough to condemn him in the eyes of those alien judges.

"Did it occur to you," he was asked, not unkindly, "that you were leaving your comrades in the lurch?"

"No," he replied. "I was trying to help one of them. Besides, the others could have done as I did if they wished."

No comment was made upon this remark, but the silence that fell upon the court made the prisoner feel that he had made an impression. The difficulty was that Private Mason was not really a soldier,

but a civilian in khaki, and that he and his judges moved in absolutely different worlds.

The presiding officer, moreover, was an unmarried man; and the prisoner felt that the kind of married man who lived at Acacia Villas could never convey certain ideas to him. Probably he could not have conveyed those ideas in any case; but he felt that his full defense would not have been made, unless the court could be given the kind of knowledge which they could only obtain by looking through the windows of number six, Acacia Villas. All through the trial, he had been vaguely staring through those windows. He could see his wife, sitting there, reading a letter from the padre—so he imagined—the letter that was not yet written, explaining that her husband. . . . No, they would not explain. For all that she need ever know he might have died heroically. They would never be cruel enough to explain. He could see Pickles lying at her feet, reading Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, while she drooped over the letter, the skillfully worded letter, and cried. He felt that all this was part of his defense. He could not understand why this thing should happen, or why it was necessary that this desolation should come upon the innocent. If it was the law, he felt that the law was full of horrible ironies. It had been pointed out to him, while he was preparing his defense, that a man might be shot for losing his nerve, but that if he incapacitated himself through "intemperate habits," he might obtain the best nursing that a grateful country could bestow upon him. The crowning irony, from Private Mason's point of view, was that in the first case he might be regarded

as a voluntary offender, while in the second case he might be regarded as an involuntary victim. The corporal who had arrested him had been unable to give evidence at the court-martial because he had been sent back to England suffering from delirium tremens.

He supposed that the root of all these inconsistencies was the radical wrong of war. He had never thought very much about the matter until circumstances had driven the hard facts home.

He could not understand these things; and he felt that, by training and tradition, it was impossible for the court to understand *him*. According to *their* standards, he had been guilty of something like the final sin; but all his previous mental history had been different from theirs. He had been obliged to ferret things out for himself, while their codes were almost like those of a great secret society. When everything else failed, they were supported by their *esprit de corps*. He had nothing like that to support him or restrain him, at the time when he made his attempt to escape.

His mind grew dazed with its whirl of thoughts. He sat there, in the dimly lighted barn, his prison, where the mice rustled through the straw. He heard the sounds of that other world, the world that had condemned him. The thrumming of the piano, the voices of the young soldiers in their endless ditty, began to have an almost hypnotic effect upon him. For a moment he closed his eyes.

"Time to go to sleep," he said.

"Say it again, Daddee," a small voice seemed to reply from a great distance.

His head dropped, jerking him back to consciousness, first of all that the nursery rhyme was being sung by somebody else, and then that it was only the voices of those incomprehensible happy-go-lucky folk, some of whom had been amongst his judges three weeks ago. He recognized the voice of the soloist, it was the rather supercilious drawl of the young president of the court-martial, a drawl clipped to a croak by the exigencies of music:

"Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
A merry old soul was he.
He called for his pipe and he called for his bowl,
And he called for his generals three."

Then with a great pounding of rhythmic fists and feet, the chorus, now some twenty voices strong, floated across the farm-yard:

"'We'd like a K.C.B.,' said the generals.

'What's the next word of command?' said the colonels.

'Blankety—blankety—blank,' said the majors,

'We—want—three—months'—leave,' said the captains.

'We—do—all—the—work,' said the subalterns.

'Move to the right in fours,' said the sergeants.

'Toot, tiddly-oot, tiddly-oot,' said the trumpeters.

'Beer—beer—beer—beer—beer,' said the corporals.

Oh,

There's none so rare

They can compare

With the boys of the British Arm-ee!"

It was as if the very nursery rhymes of number six, Acacia Villas, had been caught up in the military machine; but he was untouched by the irony of the accident. It only seemed to deepen his isolation. He felt as if he were the only human being left in the world. He wanted to speak to someone with the ordinary human weaknesses, someone that he could understand.

The answer to his wish came in an unexpected form. The door of the barn was thrust open and, against the night sky, a burly figure stood on the threshold, with a little cluster of stars glittering over his right shoulder. It was the A. P. M.

Private Mason rose hastily to his feet, clicked his heels together, and stood stiffly to attention. The A. P. M. looked curiously sheepish and embarrassed. He mumbled something that sounded like an apology, but was fully understood by the prisoner. It was indeed quite true that he and his judges had been moving in different worlds. He was to be shot, thirty hours later, at seven o'clock in the morning.

Officially, the A. P. M. was part of the military machine. Privately, he was almost more kind-hearted than was consistent with his duties, among which was the supervision of military executions.

"I'm about fed up with this job," he had said to a friend, immediately before bringing the sentence to Private Mason. "There's a couple of armies withdrawn from the front and in 'orspital now through their involuntary bad 'abits. Involuntary!—that's what the law calls 'em;—and 'ere's one o' the pluckiest little volunteers I've ever seen or 'eard

of (look at the way 'e stood up to the court-martial) goin' to be shot because 'is nerve gave way. If 'e'd broken 'is leg, 'e'd 'ave been sent to Blighty; if 'e'd been a contractor, and broken the Bank of England, 'e'd 'ave been sent to the 'Ouse of Lords; but because it was 'is nerve that broke, and we don't know nothing about nerves, we say 'e did it on purpose and we've got to shoot him. We're bloody barbarians, that's wot we are. If we win this war, we shan't 'ave the guts to punish the blighters that brought it on; but we put a little chap like this up against a wall and shoot 'im for bein' a volunteer, and because we're not afraid of the consequences. I tell you straight—it's 'im that's the 'ero, and us that's the cowards. Bloody lot of wild savages, that's wot we are. I've 'ad too many of these shootings. I always do my best to save the pore blighter any unnecessary suffering by painting a white bull's-eye over his 'eart, so as to 'elp the aim of the men; but the men don't like shootin' their own flesh and blood, even if his eyes are bandaged. It's only to help the firing-party that we bandage 'em, though we always pretend it's for the sake of the prisoner. I tell the men that nobody knows whose rifles are loaded, but they fire wide, most of 'em, on the chance; and then, of course, I 'ave to go and finish 'im off with a revolver. I'm damned if I'm goin' to think of the men to-morrow mornin'. I'm not going to be such a crawling hypocrite. I'm goin' to think of the prisoner. I'm goin' to paint a white bull's-eye on 'im as big as 'is 'eart and load every man jack's rifle with my own hands."

The A. P. M. gave no outward sign of his

thoughts while he was delivering the cold verdict to the prisoner, in the most official language at his command. Before he turned to go, he looked hard at this white-faced young man who still stood rigidly to attention, showing no signs of mental stress, except the change of color and the long streaks of sweat that made his face glisten in the dim lamp-light. The A. P. M., too, looked hot and uncomfortable. He stood there, holding his red hat in his left hand, while he mopped his face with a khaki handkerchief.

"'Aven't I seen you before, in England, somewhere?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. You enlisted me."

"Ah, I remember," said the A. P. M., and it was true. His mind traveled back to the thin young woman, with large dark eyes, who had smiled up at him through restrained tears, while he described the advantages of the Army to her husband. His promise of what it would do for him, physically, had been fulfilled, even in this short time, he thought, as he looked at the slight upright figure of the prisoner. The Army had made a new man of him. The chest had filled out, he had developed a good pair of shoulders, and he had taken his sentence more courageously than the A. P. M. had ever seen it taken before. It seemed wasteful to shoot him now.

"I'm very sorry for you," he muttered. "We none of us know what may be coming to us. It's just the fortunes of war. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, sir," said Private Mason. "I'd like to send a message to my wife."

"The padre will do all that for you. I'll send him at once."

"Thank you, sir."

Then the most astonishing thing happened. The A. P. M. seemed to want to say something else, something that he could not put into words. He struggled with it for a moment, and decided to express it in another way. He gravely put on his red hat, clicked his heels together, looked straight at the condemned man, and raised his hand to the salute.

Private Mason stood there, still rigidly at attention, almost ceasing to breathe, as his eyes caught and answered—across a great gulf it seemed—that momentary gleam of understanding in the other man's eyes. Strangely enough, though it came from the military machine, the gesture helped him as it was meant to do. He discerned for a moment that the other man was almost as helpless as himself; and that, if this execution was unjust, it was because this temporal habitation of ours, this place of fragmentary knowledge and illusory shadows, was not the home of justice. The salute seemed, somehow, to be an acknowledgment of this, and it sustained him.

"I'll give your message at once," said the A. P. M., slightly emphasizing the last phrase, as his hand dropped from the salute. Then he turned and strode hastily out.

For nearly a quarter of a minute after he was gone, Private Mason remained standing there, in his frozen attitude of attention.

X

THE CONFESSIONAL

NURSE HOPKINS wheeled her patient out on to the balcony overlooking Lac Bourget, and took a chair beside him. It was a beautiful autumn morning. Long gray clouds were drifting lightly over the wine-colored heights of the Dent du Chat, and on the winding road below the house two white oxen were bringing up a wagon-load of black grapes. An old woman in wooden shoes hobbled beside it, carrying a brown yard-long roll of bread under her arm.

"Would you like me to read to you, Mr. Peterson?"

"No, thank you, nurse. There won't be time to get through another book, and newspapers don't interest me. I'm always very sorry when you barricade yourself behind a book."

Nurse Hopkins looked at her patient with a somewhat forced smile, almost as if she disliked him, or, at any rate, found him difficult to understand. He was a wistful figure—this gaunt man of fifty, with the brown aquiline face, and the dying eyes which, just because they were dying, seemed to glow with twice the intensity of normal life.

"Life and death make short work of books," he murmured. "History makes a pretty poor substitute for fiction. When we have discovered how little we know about our most intimate friends, we don't

take the gentlemen very seriously who tell us all the secret motives of Burleigh or of Queen Elizabeth. Fiction is better. At any rate, it helps the imagination to explore possibilities beyond the lying facts; and facts do lie, you know, nurse, they lie like the devil. So I should prefer to talk to you. Nurses, even more than doctors, must have a dreadful knowledge of the human comedy—and tragedy. I suppose it's true that every man falls in love with his nurse; but—do you know, you've been uncommonly good to me. If the doctors could make me thirty-five again the first thing I should do would be to ask you to be my wife, and—of course—that would be the last I should see of you; for I know that—despite your professional interest—you must very cordially dislike me. How long do the doctors give me? Three months at the outside, isn't it? Three months from last Saturday. Two days gone already. Look here, doctors and nurses sometimes make mistakes. Will you take a sporting chance on it, and marry me on condition that I live for four months only? It won't make any difference to you. I shall be gone at the end of three and a half anyway; and I've no residuary legatee. It would make the final exit a little less lonely, it seems to me. Pshaw! Look here, nurse, dear girl, I didn't mean to—you see, we've never even talked. Something has frozen up all the wells until to-night. You've avoided every attempt that I've made to tell you what was locked up in my mind. Look me straight in the face, now. Don't tell me you didn't know me from the first. Damn it! Nurses don't do that sort of thing. It's unreasonable to cry now."

"I wasn't," said Nurse Hopkins. The harsh coldness of her voice conflicted so strangely with the brightness of her eyes that Mr. Peterson dropped his irony. It was an extraordinary conversation between patient and nurse; but all their conversations lately had been like veils of mist through which they crossed deadly but invisible weapons.

He raised his head a little and peered at her face.

"It is unusual, I know, in the modern world," he said at last, more gently, "but those were real tears, nurse, and if they only meant that you thought I wasn't altogether a bad sort, it would be quite enough for me. Now look here, there is something I want you to do for me after I am gone. I want you to give some information to some friends of mine in England. There will be an atrocious fuss if they get hold of it while I am alive; and I don't want to spoil the peace of the last few weeks here. The only person that the information really concerns is dead, so that a month or two won't matter. It is a question of clearing a dead man's name, you see, and the dead man himself didn't even want to be cleared. The people that killed him certainly wouldn't want him to be cleared; and the newspapers that helped to give him a bad name wouldn't want him to be cleared, unless it would increase their circulation. But I have got to do it, if only for the purpose of shaking the smug faith of the world in its own righteousness. Take this key. In the top right-hand drawer of my innovation trunk you will find a diary bound in red leather. I wrote down everything I wanted you to know this morning, for you

seemed determined not to let me talk to you about it."

"I don't want to know it," said Nurse Hopkins. "I don't see how anything could possibly——"

"You can't decide till you've read it. And I'm not asking you to read it entirely for my own sake, but as I told you, to clear the name of a dead man. If you feel like that about it, it puzzles me altogether why you don't leave me to die as best I can. I suppose it is just professional etiquette to stick to it, eh?"

Nurse Hopkins flushed a little.

"I am here to nurse you, Mr. Peterson, and it is not good for you to discuss your private affairs. I shall have to leave you for a while now."

"Wait a minute. If you want to be fair, not only to myself, but to others, you really must do as I ask you. Read what I have to say, if you don't want me to talk about it. Take it downstairs now and read it. If you don't feel differently then, I'll never mention the subject again. You can take the next train home, and I'll die as quickly as possible."

"I'll do as you wish," she said, in a voice that was almost inaudible, and she left him.

In her room downstairs Nurse Hopkins opened the diary and began to read with a set gray face. It was written in a curious semi-ironical style that, like the conversation of Mr. Peterson, was obviously a mask for emotions of another kind; and he maintained all the odd mystification of their talk.

"It all happened when I was about twenty-seven years of age; and of course, the mere existence of a

certain girl—we will call her Evelyn for convenience—was the primary cause of the trouble. I was very much in love with her. So was another man, a man of forty, whom—also for convenience—we will call Smith. The girl was only seventeen; and I had some reason, beyond my youthful conceit, for thinking she cared for me, a little—at any rate, more than she cared for the other man. Unfortunately for me, her parents wouldn't have anything to do with me; and I suspect that Smith knew why.

"He was comparatively wealthy, and I was a penniless young artist, with no prospects, except a possible inheritance from my father of a few farm-buildings and two hundred acres, which he had mortgaged up to the limit. Smith had it all in his own hands. He could wipe my father out of existence if he wished; and, of course, as he was a thoroughly respectable church-goer, churchwarden, and all the rest of it, he had no compunction about the use of the excellent cards that he held. He was helped, too, by the fact that, for purposes of my work, I had recently taken a studio at Hampstead and was able to see Evelyn only occasionally. He even managed—by veiled threats—to make my father oppose my love affair. Like most parents he was quite ready to look upon his own children's love-affairs as quite unnecessary and probably disgraceful entanglements. But I didn't suspect Smith's agency in this until afterwards. My father was a very reticent man—very unlike his son, I suppose you are thinking—and I attributed his anxiety to financial causes and his distrust of my own future as an artist.

"I did suspect that Smith had some hold on Evelyn's parents; and that for their sake she went out of her way to placate him. But I was confident that she loved me. I still believed that she loved me.

"I wish I could describe her to you. Odd, my confiding like this in the woman I've just insulted by a proposal of marriage, isn't it? But you see, it was a quarter of a century ago, and one can afford to look on all that as a mere boy and girl affair, when the boy is an old man with only a few more months to live.

"One morning a letter from Evelyn came to the studio. It announced quite coolly and quietly that she was to be married to Smith on the following Saturday, and it said that she knew I would wish her every happiness. Perhaps because she thought it her duty, perhaps because she thought it the best way of softening the blow, she took it for granted that we had been simply the very best of friends. There wasn't a word of sorrow or compunction. Looking back now, I don't see how there could have been; but, at the time, I thought it the most cold-blooded epistle ever written. There had been no form of engagement between us; but there were memories of a thousand hours, memories of words, kisses, tears even, that had at least sealed us as lovers.

"When that letter arrived, it broke my mind away from all its moorings, I suppose. All that I can remember is that for some twelve hours afterwards I was carried away by forces that seemed to be utterly beyond my own control, an irresistible wave of blind anger and grief. From one point of view I was as helpless as a planet on its destined course,

from another point of view I was endowed with more than my own power of dealing with any obstacles. Whether I should deal wisely with them, or blindly and brutally, is another question. Normally, at that time, I was a somewhat casual and inefficient creature. I remember how the queer imp in one's brain, the imp that always seems to sit in the corner playing the critical spectator, affected a certain half comical surprise at the speed and efficiency with which I locked up my studio and caught the last train down to Green Bay that night.

"It was nearly midnight when I reached Green Bay. There were no vehicles of any kind to be obtained at that hour, and I set out on foot along the cliffs towards Miller's Dyke.

"It was a beautiful night. There was no room, but the stars were all the brighter. Miraculously bright they were, after the foggy skies of London, and their frosty glitter was just enough to show me the lumps of white chalk that marked the thin path along the cliff at intervals to prevent the coastguard and other solitary night-walkers from taking a three hundred foot drop to the beach.

"Every detail of that walk comes back to me—the way the lights went out along the front and the pier at Green Bay; the sparkle of the lanterns on the fishing boats out at sea, only distinguishable from the lower stars by their heaving, dipping, and occasional vanishing into the troughs of the unseen waves.

"I was about a quarter of a mile from Miller's Dyke, and I could see a single light in an upper window of the house where Evelyn lived. I had my

eyes fixed upon it, so that I did not see a short burly figure walking leisurely ahead of me until I was near enough to recognize it as that of the man who had robbed me of all I valued in life. I quickened my pace and called out to him. He stopped and faced me.

"When he saw who it was, he gave a contemptuous little laugh and said, 'Oh, it's you, is it? What are you doing down here?' Then he turned his back to me and walked away from the cliffs towards the village.

"I think now that perhaps he was a little alarmed at this encounter, and that his action was more cowardly than insolent; but it stung like a whip. I hurried after him and caught him by the arm.

" 'Wait a moment. I have a question or two to ask you,' I said.

"He drew back, with his fat clean-shaven face whitening, found that he could not wrench his arm free, and, without a word, he struck me across the face with his open hand. Something hard and sharp—a ring, I think—caught and tore the skin along my cheek like a knuckle-duster. The pain of it goaded me to fury; and, although it is a curious reflection on human nature, I believe that, if it had not been for that blow, my more serious quarrel with him might have had a very different ending. I caught him by the throat with both hands and shoved him back towards the cliff, throttling him till his tongue came out between his teeth and his beady little black eyes stood out like the eyes of a crab.

"I remember, as I got him near the edge of the cliff, the fierce joy with which I felt his fat body

trying to nerve itself for a supreme effort, and knew that I could meet it with a greater, even if he could summon up the reserve force of an Antæus. I remember, too, the meaningless cry of warning that I gave when I had him staggering on the very brink. 'Be careful, you dog, be careful!' Then came a ghastly moment when I heaved him over. He caught at my coat, and we both did a dance of death on the edge, and I had to drag him back or we should both have gone to hell together. Then—just as I was pulling him into temporary safety, his grip relaxed for a moment and I gave him my fist full on the point of his jaw and sent him clean over the edge.

"It was just as if he had vanished into the air. I could hardly realize that I had killed a man. I stood there on the cliff in a sudden extraordinary isolation, an uncanny loneliness, listening for some resultant sound that it seemed should have shaken the world. And there was nothing. I didn't hear even a trickle of loose chalk on the face of the cliff. I suppose my mind was not working normally. It sounds farcical, but I am trying to tell you the exact truth as it happened, and as I stood there, I muttered to myself in a kind of amazed loneliness:

" 'By God, Smith, old boy, I never thought I should miss you so much.'

"I had a sense, however, of physical relief; and this was succeeded almost at once by a crystal-clear consciousness of the situation in which I had placed myself, a consciousness aided considerably by the sound of footsteps approaching along the high road,

which was only about twenty yards from the cliff at that point.

"I seemed to see in a single flash all the consequences, the discovery of the body, the headlines in the newspapers, the local hue and cry, and all the nation-wide activities of Scotland Yard and the rest of the machinery of justice that would be set going within the next few hours. I saw the watchers at the railway stations and the seaports, just as I had visualized them a score of times when other poor devils had been hunted.

"'Poor devils,' I said. But after all, I don't know. If like myself, they felt, for only a few minutes, the savage exultation of the game in which one man's wits are pitted against the world, they had their compensations. That is where your writers of fiction fail you. They describe the hunt from the point of view of the hunter, but I can tell you there is a devilish lot more in it from the other standpoint. My brain seemed to be superhumanly active and clear at that moment, as if it had drawn upon hitherto unsuspected reserves of instinct and reason to meet the emergency.

"As soon as the footsteps had died away towards the village, I searched the ground, every inch of it, for any chance clew that I might have dropped in the struggle. I crept on my hands and knees over the trampled ground, and felt over the grass with my fingers. I examined all my pockets, my clothing, and as far as I could tell not even a button was missing.

"Then—mark you, I took a pleasure in it, a real pleasure in it, a pleasure that was a revelation to the

civilized part of me—I made once more for the clump of gorse-bushes where I could think out everything that had to be done.

“There was nothing—so far as I could see at first—that could directly connect me with the murder, or lead to suspicion of me, except the broken engagement and the fact that I might find it difficult if I were questioned to account for my absence from London that night. However, I lived alone in my Hampstead studio and, if I returned to London at once, I thought at first that I might easily bluff it out. There seemed to be no reason why anyone should know that I had ever left London. Then I pictured one by one a dozen vivid little incidents of precisely the kind that I found so damning in the newspaper reports of murder cases. I saw the cross-examination of Evelyn about the letter she had written to me, the examination of Mrs. Webb, the caretaker at the studios, on my unconcealed agitation over its receipt; the encounter with the ticket collector. He would doubtless have no difficulty in picking out the strangely agitated passenger from the usual row of young men in blue suits. I was not at all sure, even, whether I had passed anyone who knew me in Green Bay.

“Altogether, my first thought of going straight back to my studio in London and bluffing things out appeared to be too dangerous. Fortunately I had suggested to Mrs. Webb that I might be going into the country for a few days. It would be better for me to carry out that suggestion and make it the excuse for disappearing as completely as possible. It would serve the double purpose of allowing me to

evade the police and at the same time, if the worst came to the worst and they arrested me, I should still have the explanation that, with the traditional irresponsibility of young artists, I had gone into the depths of the country at short notice and knew nothing of the hue and cry. I had gone on those expeditions before in the summer, taking with me nothing but a sketch-book, a sleeping sack, and a tooth-brush; and it occurred to me that a camping-out plan would be by far the best way of avoiding the tell-tale evidence of dates, if ever I had to explain where I had lodged on certain nights. There were obvious difficulties. The evidence of the ticket collector would still remain, but it would hardly be precise enough in itself to convict me. Lying there among the gorse-bushes, I set myself to fill in other necessary details with all the art of which I was capable; and, on the whole, I think that the picture which I should have been able to present to a British jury would have been more readily accepted by them than any of my other works by the juries of art.

"In less than five minutes, in fact, when my brain was working at fever heat, I had a scheme so complete that I snapped my fingers with satisfaction over it. In my youthful self-conceit, I imagined that, after all, any man with an intellect and a fair start should always be able to outwit the pack of stupid officials to whom these cases were usually intrusted. I remembered the village policeman who, in a former murder case, had called at the house of the suspected man and said to him, 'I beg your pardon, sir, but there's a rumor going about to the effect that you poisoned your aunt. Would

you mind telling me if there's any truth in it?' I drew comfort from that story, though I knew that Scotland Yard would be a more serious affair.

"The first thing I did was pretty cold-blooded, I confess; but I was young enough to have the strongest kind of interest in fighting for my life, and there was too much at stake for me to have any real feeling about the scoundrel I had killed. About a hundred yards away from the point of the struggle, there was a certain narrow gully that sloped to the beach. I made my way to it through the gorse, scrambled down, and went stumbling over the chalk bowlders at the base of the cliff to where the body lay.

"It wasn't a pretty sight, even in that deep shadow. I won't describe it to you, further than to say that, as a precaution, I took off my coat and rolled up my sleeves before I went through the dead man's pockets. His watch was smashed. It would have been useless to me, probably, in any case; but there was money, in gold and silver, to the tune of about ten pounds. This was very important to me, and better than I had expected. The very smallest amount of money would be important to me now, and I had been ready to take the chance of finding considerably less. It never occurred to me to have any scruples about taking it, for I was living on a very primitive level now, and the dead man had robbed me of a good deal more than money. I wondered whether there was any possibility that the death would be attributed to an accidental fall over the cliff, and I struck a match—one of the dead man's matches—to make sure. It seemed queer that

it should be so easy to kindle anything belonging to that dead lump.

"The condition of the throat eliminated the possibility of accident, and I decided that the best thing to do was to gain time by concealing the body as completely as possible. There was a little cave in the chalk almost immediately behind it. I took the body by the heels, dragged it into the cavity, and covered it with the biggest lumps of chalk that I could find. Then, with a jagged stone, I tried to provoke a fall of the soft walls of the cliff itself over the entrance. With a little luck, there might be a fall of some tons of chalk over it at the next tide.

"At various points in the neighborhood there were notices warning people not to sit under those crumbling heights; but it was in the ironical nature of things, of course, that cliffs should usually fall upon the heads, not of the dead but of the living.

"However, I did my best to make up for the deficiencies of nature, and I had almost obliterated the mouth of the little cave when I heard a sound that turned every nerve in my body to a tingling thread of ice, the sound of heavy footsteps approaching along the beach.

"It was the one impossible surprise that there should have been anyone wandering at that time of night on a beach that even by day was almost untrodden. I crouched in the shadow of the cliff and tried to conceal myself as far as possible behind a big wave-rounded boulder of chalk. In a few moments I saw a dark figure stumbling round a corner

of the cliffs, so close to them that if he pursued his course he was bound to see me.

"It is an old story, of course, with the moralists, that one thing leads to another, but I never realized its meaning so fully as I did at that moment when I found myself clutching a jagged stone and quietly—almost without any conscious thought preparing to commit a second murder in order to remove an unfortunate witness. Happily for himself, and perhaps for me, the strange visitant to that lonely beach was not in a condition to make an effective witness of anything. About twenty yards away from me, after swearing volubly at a little green crab which he affirmed loudly was trying to make him think that he had been drinking too much, for it should have been red and not green, he burst into an uproarious ditty that set the jackdaws flapping their wings all over the face of the cliff, singing:

" 'I wanna bee, I wanna bee,
I wanna be way down in Dixie,
Where the hens are dog-gone glad to lay
Scrambled eggs in the new-mown hay—'

"He floundered on, stumbling occasionally over a slippery bit of sea weed, and cursing to himself in a way that at least proved him to be quite insensible to his surroundings. In a minute or two he had rounded the next point towards Green Bay; but the echoes of his raucous voice and the flapping of the jackdaws about the cliff at the moment when silence and secrecy had been so important to me had given me something of a shock. The incident seemed almost symbolical of the unexpected things that

always happen to the most shrewdly calculating of criminals. It had the effect of hurrying me over the rest of my precautions. It occurred to me that he might be followed by some anxious friend, not so drunk as himself; but I spent about a quarter of an hour in obliterating the marks on the sand and shingle where the body had fallen. Some of the stones I carried to the water's edge and threw into the sea. Then—simply as a precaution, for I couldn't see very well in that dim light—I washed my hands and the money in the rock pool, I climbed up the gulley again, struck inland across the open downs, took a wide circuit round the village, and made for Whitehaven, the seaport, which lies about four miles to the east of Miller's Dyke, as perhaps you know.

"I calculated that, even if the body were discovered in the next twenty-four hours (and it was very unlikely on that unfrequented beach), I should have at least forty-eight hours before the hunters could be actively on my own trail. It would probably be longer, for inquiry would have to be made before suspicion could fasten on me, and one had to allow for the time it always takes to set the machinery of the law in motion. With any luck it might be a week before I should be in danger of arrest, but I was working on the minimum chance. At any rate, I bought my ticket for the early morning train at Whitehaven with complete confidence. I had a carriage to myself, and the journey up to London gave me time to think things over more fully and, incidentally, to change my plans in one important detail. If there was going to be any

camping out I decided that it should not take place in England. I pictured myself sleeping in haystacks, somewhere down in Cornwall, but it occurred to me that an artist would find an equally good excuse for losing himself in Brittany, and that it would be infinitely safer to cross the Channel before the hue and cry began. I had no qualms as I passed the ticket collector at London Bridge. I reached the studio about ten o'clock and entered by the back door, which was not overlooked from any direction. It took me about five minutes to secure all that I wanted, including one or two small treasures on which I might raise a little money. I got myself some breakfast, and while the kettle was boiling I took off my boots and lay down in my camp bed in order that Mrs. Webb might testify to the fact that it had been occupied on the previous night. I left a note for her on the table saying that I was going into the country for a week or two. It was quite a cheery little note. I inclosed her dues for the week and asked her kindly to take a pair of brown boots to be re-soled for me.

"By five o'clock that afternoon I had sold or pawned quite a number of unconsidered trifles and with the money that I already had in hand I found myself in possession of nearly sixty pounds. By five o'clock on the following afternoon I was in Paris, and to cut a long story short—for my plans developed as I went—five days later I was in Cairo.

"It would make a very long story if I were to give you all the details of the weeks I spent in Cairo, and the months I spent aboard ship in various capacities, before I eventually landed at San Fran-

cisco. Almost the first thing I saw after landing was a news stand on which there were displayed some tins of my favorite English tobacco and a pile of Lloyd's weekly newspapers. I secured all that I could buy of both, and after some inquiries I obtained a complete set of the back numbers to the date of the murder. You can imagine the feverish eagerness with which I read those detailed accounts in the squalid little bedroom of the seaman's inn to which I repaired that evening. The discovery had been made much earlier than I expected. I had forgotten that Smith's own movements were likely to be so traceable; and, in fact, they led directly to an inspection of the very place where he fell. Chapter by chapter I followed the wild man-hunt that had covered the whole of the British Isles, the arrests of various unoffending but stupid people who were suspected of being in the vicinity on the night of the murder and their subsequent release. Then came a point in the story when it was announced that the police believed themselves to be in possession of a clew that might lead to important results at any moment.

"The careful avoidance, as it seemed to me, of the slightest reference to myself made me feel sure that this was the stage at which their suspicions had begun to fasten upon me. I read everything in order, not anticipating a single stage. Then, the following week, I came upon an announcement in large headlines that stopped my heart as I read:—

CLIFF MURDER MYSTERY SOLVED

AMAZING CONFESSION BY UNSUSPECTED MAN

and the next moment I was reading, as if in a trance, a paragraph that seemed to be more fantastic than anything from the *Arabian Nights*, the bland cold statement that, about the time when I was doing odd jobs in Cairo, my father had surrendered himself to the police as the murderer of John Smith.

"I do not know whether I read the reports of what followed, or whether the hideous details transferred themselves by some strange telepathy from the printed columns to my brain. But, point by point, they branded themselves into my mind like white-hot needles. I saw exactly how it had happened. In some way or other it was my father, and not the police, who had obtained the first clew to my movements. It was he, and not the police, who had been convinced that I was the murderer; and, to save me, he had deliberately diverted all the evidence to prove himself guilty. He had done it very subtly, suggesting his motive by the very line of defense that he adopted. His defense was based simply upon the veiled threats of ruining him that had been made by Smith. The letters that he adduced in proof became the strongest weapons in the armory of the prosecution. The picture that presented itself to me—vivid as an hallucination—of the final mad travesty of justice which we poor confused human beings call the judge's summing up and verdict; the putting on of the black cap; the crowd outside the prison walls on the morning of the execution; struck me down on my knees like an appalling light from Heaven.

"It was some days afterwards before I was able to think coherently at all and before I was able to

read the whole ghastly story through and discover the allusions, the sympathetic allusions, to the murderer's family, and to myself, the promising young artist who, it was feared, had been driven by shame to commit suicide.

"My first impulse was to give myself up to the authorities at once, for the twofold purpose of clearing my father's name and of dealing one blow, at least, to the smug confidence of men in their own verdicts. The first reason was really the only one that weighed with me so strongly as to make me wish, in the vigor of my youth, to die on the gallows. At the end of my life I can affirm, and perhaps I can affirm to you, what I could not have affirmed earlier and to the world at large, with any hope of being believed. But I do most solemnly swear that I was withheld from giving myself up by what seemed to me to be the living and most urgent presence of the man who had sacrificed himself for me. Perhaps you will say that I deceived myself; but his voice was ever in my ears; repeating again and again that he had given himself to save me; not that there should be a second victim. You must remember that he, as well as I, looked upon the man I had killed as a scoundrel who deserved to die, and I suppose it was this that seemed to justify the use of the word 'victim.'

"It was this living and urgent presence that finally led me into the path which I have followed ever since. I had a strangely checkered career for some years, before what the world calls 'success' eventually came to me; and it would make a pretty good jest, for whatever devils may be capable of laughter

at the follies of the world, that the particular event in my life which the world would dignify with the name of success should be associated merely with the purchase for a few dollars of a dirty bit of waste ground on which, a few years later, we struck oil.

"For my own part, the only thing that kept me going at all was the endeavor to carry out some of the admonitions of that invisible presence of the victim to the best of my ability. Wherever I have been able to do a little private overruling of the decrees of human justice, wherever I have been able to set the crooked straight, or pluck the condemned out of their pit, I have done whatever the wealth that accrued to me enabled me to do.

"I am at the end of my life now, and I came to Europe with two purposes. About a year ago I happened to hear, in a roundabout way, as a distant echo of the Miller's Dyke case, that Evelyn was still alive and that she had remained unmarried. I heard it spoken of as an instance of romantic tragedy. Apparently she had really cared for the young artist who had disappeared, and I made up my mind that if possible I would find her. She was the one person in this world to whom I could possibly disburden myself. The other purpose—which time could not really affect—was that of clearing the whole matter up, clearing the name of my father and dealing my final blow, feeble as it might be, at the judgments of men. Curiously enough, the restraining voice no longer withheld me from this purpose. It seemed rather to encourage me, as if to put the finishing stroke to a long task."

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There were several more pages; but Nurse Hopkins read no further. She locked the diary in a drawer of her dressing-table, and went quietly upstairs to her patient. Her face was very white and her body trembled a little.

"I have read it," she said, in a curiously hard abrupt voice.

Peterson lifted his head quickly and looked at her. As their eyes met her control failed and she went down on her knees at the side of his chair, sobbing. He stretched out a hand as if he would have touched her head, but was withheld by the remembrance of what his hands had done.

"Don't, don't, for God's sake," he whispered to her. "Of course, you knew me all the while, but you seem to have raised a barrier of ice between us. I didn't think it possible for you to do anything else in the circumstances; but I thought, perhaps, if you knew the whole story, you might find it easier to think of me as a human being, that's all."

"Oh, don't you understand?" she said, looking up at him with a passionate reproach in her voice. "It is I that want to be forgiven. Don't you understand that I've always cared for you more than anyone on earth? You have written down everything as you think it happened; but there is one thing you couldn't know. Till I read the diary to-night I had done you a horrible injustice. I always thought it impossible, if you were alive, that you should not have known of your father's trial. I couldn't bear to think it, of you, and yet—— O, Jack, Jack, what are we poor helpless human creatures to do?"

It had grown quite dark on the balcony. Lac Bourget was covered by the night and the garden below was illuminated only by the long streaks of light from the dining-room windows. No more words passed between them for a long time; but his arms were round her, and his lips found her face salt with tears.

Considerable interest was displayed by the press of two continents in the "nurse's romance" as it was called, when it was known that a penniless hospital nurse had married the dying oil king for his millions. In the Sunday newspapers it almost eclipsed the new murder case which was being featured at the time under similar headlines:

STOCK-BROKERS'S ROMANCE

MIDDLE-AGED MAN POISONS HIS WIFE

It was not till the death of Peterson six months later that the world discovered it had made another mistake about the romance of the hospital nurse, and that the millions were going to a charitable institution. The world did not know that Nurse Hopkins had asked Peterson to make this arrangement before they were married, and that she had stipulated that nothing was to be left to her but the happiness of those last months. Not knowing this, the world was able to whisper that he had found her out after the romantic marriage; and it was not until her own death, in the plague-stricken districts of Serbia during the war, that the revelation was

made in full and the true names given as Peterson had desired. The waves of the war obliterated even this nine days' wonder quickly; but once again there were quite effective headlines:

INNOCENT MAN HANGED FOR SON'S CRIME

SON'S CONFESSION AFTER TWENTY YEARS

ALLOWED FATHER TO TAKE HIS PLACE ON THE
GALLOWS

XI

THE PARSON'S TALE

I

The tale of the parson and his friend, the convict, really began many generations ago. But the remote past can be dismissed very briefly if the reader will remember, through all the following story of the present day, these concise facts. Somewhere about 1860, a certain Oxford undergraduate, named John Rowlandson, came up to London from Rye in Sussex with a strikingly beautiful girl named Hannah Golden, the daughter of a small farmer; and, in the language of the period, he brought about her "ruin." He was by no means a scoundrel. He was a lively and attractive young man, endowed with over-much wealth, and surrounded by many temptations. He was able to persuade Hannah Golden to come to London with him, not because she was light-minded, but because she was in love with him; and, without intending it seriously, he had made her so. Hannah Golden was quite serious, and he never realized it. He went abroad (in the Indian Civil Service) without realizing it, and without realizing that there had been any consequences. She did not return home as he thought. Her relations never knew what became of her. Nor did Rowlandson. In 1860, "ruin was ruin."

In 1922, when Chapman asked me to come and see him, at his quarters in one of the worst districts of London, he told me that it was the kind of place where the criminal was safer than the ordinary citi-

zen. On one occasion the police had asked him for certain information. He had refused to give it. They warned him that, unless he did, his own life would be in danger; for his knowledge of certain facts would make his death desirable among men who would stick at nothing. "That's only another reason for keeping my mouth shut," he said. "I'm a priest, not an informer." But I didn't know how bad it was until I saw it.

He met me on the outskirts of his grim domain, and guided me through the worst of it. (He told me afterwards that he had some trouble over this visit of mine, for a suspicious deputation called upon him and wanted to know who I was, and why I had come. He was able to satisfy them by pointing me out in one of his rowing photographs, and telling them I was only an old college friend whom he had not seen for twenty years.)

We went through alleys that were more like rat holes than anything made by man. But my lean, bare-headed friend, striding along like a soldier-monk in his rusty black cassock, seemed to be generally accepted, as a part of that dreadful world, by the semi-human creatures that swarmed around the rotten doorways. They acquired more human lineaments as he passed, and sometimes broke into vestigial smiles. His keen gray eyes missed nobody. I never heard so many Christian names in the course of a short walk. It was "Hello, Jack! Hello, Dick!" all through that seething horror; and the children, the swarming children, indistinguishable as one dirty bundle of rags from another, he knew every one. They came running up to him, caught

his hand, held on to his cassock. Hardly any words passed. He simply called them by their names—names that might have amused a caricaturist by their irony, so many Lilies there were in that grime, so many Violets in that filth, so many Rosies in that squalor—but I could hardly see sometimes, for the pity of the thing itself, and the sense of the forlorn fight that he had been making against it, down there, for a whole generation, while his friends had been pursuing their “careers.”

I don't know what ironic devil had named some of those alleys; but it wrung the heart to see, upon the corner of one narrow way-through hell, the legend *Elfin Row*; and, above the dark little tumble-down cock-pit beyond, the words *Pixey Place*. But no, it was not irony. The one saving fact about the attitude of humanity to the evils of the world is that it is not deliberate. These places had been so named simply because they were small; but it filled me with a sense of shame, and hurt like a sneer at a child's heart.

I had not seen Chapman since we rowed together in our college eight; but it all came back to me now, even in that new setting and atmosphere. The change from rowing shorts to cassock, from the bright airs of the river and the flags of the barges to the fogs and filth of this inferno, had made no essential difference. The young athlete with his almost dainty disdain for all softness of living was still there, almost unchanged. He was engaged in a new and sterner kind of athletics, that was all; and in the pale ascetic face I recognized at once the firm lines of the chin that I had seen turning over

his left shoulder at the finish of many hard-fought races. He had always had a clean simplicity of mind and soul; but, if I could have pictured him in the Church at all, I should have expected to find him in a fashionable West End Parish. He was still unmarried—"celibate," I suppose he would have called it (for he used the ecclesiastical vocabulary, not in the least out of any affectation, but simply as an engineer uses the terms of his calling). The war against human wrongs had worn him a little, but worn him into his own identity, developed him, as an insufficiently developed photograph is brought out by a bath of acid.

Only one thing really surprised me, and that was the occasional glint of something like fanaticism in the eyes. I had seen the glint of determination there before a race, a hard gay light that meant to win if possible; but this was something else, something that bore the same relation to it as the soul to the body; and yet it was sharper, perhaps narrower, than any merely spiritual light. "Fanaticism" is perhaps the best word, and it was as alien from my former impression of the young athlete as it was from any merely intellectual life. It seemed to endow him with some almost mediæval characteristics. He looked at times like a mediæval saint; and yet he was undoubtedly Chapman, Chapman, who stroked the eight.

He had been almost the typical athlete, untroubled by the intellectual world. Books meant very little to him, unless they bore directly upon his work. I doubt whether he knew even the names of more than three living artists and poets; but his innocence of

these things had not the effect of ignorance. One had the feeling that his mind and soul were all the fresher for it, as if they had kept themselves unspotted by frequent cold baths. The contrast between this almost radiant spotlessness and his surroundings reminded one again of the spirit of the Middle Ages. But Chapman, of course, maintained the contrast on the physical as well as on the other side.

The first time I caught the glint of the fanatic was when, in his gloomy little house, he told me how he had refused to take a wedding at a fashionable West End Church. Walton, the bridegroom, was an old friend and wanted him to officiate. "But I couldn't," he said. "How could I leave all this, and go up there, without feeling a humbug? Royalty was to be present, and half the fashionable world, and the very arrangements showed that far more reverence was to be paid to man than to God. I said I would attend the wedding, simply as a member of the congregation, because I liked old Walton. But the humbug of it! I felt like a traitor. I'd dug up my wedding garments. It was years since I'd worn a top-hat and tail-coat; and I noticed as I went through the streets here that even the children avoided me as if I were a stranger. When I came back that evening I was the loneliest man in London. They looked at me—those kids—from the doors, and just stayed there. It might have been shyness. I don't know. Anyway, they avoided me, and it hurt like sin. At last, just before I reached my own door, a little mite of a girl stood before me, in the dusk, and looked up at me with

great wide eyes. 'Oh, it *is* you,' she said. 'I thought it was one of those men that come for the dead ones.'

"That was her idea of the wedding garments. Almost the sort of thing that they put in the funny papers, isn't it? But as soon as I got inside my own door, I tore the wretched things off, and crept into my cassock again, and felt very much as Dr. Jekyll must have felt when he had thrown off Hyde. Only—I shall never do it again."

He was interrupted by a loud knock at the front door, and answered it himself. There was nobody to be seen; but a scrap of paper had been dropped into the letter-box. It bore a scrawled message:—

"Sir there is a young man standing under the thaird lampost in Klondike Streat has nowhair to go and has been getin into truble they have been after him the last three days will be obliged if you will speak to him on your way to evening serviss I tole him you would be kareful becaus this is the first time he was ever in truble."

"What do you suppose it is?" I asked him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Probably theft. Possibly murder. Anything happens down here." But Chapman was evidently used to this sort of thing, for he resumed the conversation at once, just where it had been broken off, with all the calm of an editor who is merely keeping a young author waiting in an ante-room. But he was not unconcerned. I understood that it was his rule, as it is that of the physicians of the body, to take these things with a certain measured pace, except in cases of obvious emergency.

The fanatical glint came into his eyes again as he spoke of a famous dignitary of the Church who had been writing something in a newspaper. He picked up the offending sheet and read it with a resentful harshness that was quite unlike his usual tone: "We have become a reading nation. We all have access to the best that has been thought and said on the spiritual life without troubling the parson. He is no longer better instructed than his congregation. The metaphor of a shepherd and his sheep has become absurd."

"I wonder if that man ever gets out of his library," he said. "I wish I could have him down here for a week or two. It's damnable the way these philosophical clerics let us down, and play fast and loose with their creed. They are in honor bound to get out, if they don't believe in their Church." This had just a little of the narrowness which I had noticed before; but, as I said, it was the narrowness of a mind that had retained, or acquired, some of the characteristics that gave an edge of steel to the saints of the Middle Ages. It was so blazingly and hopelessly honest from the point of view of the modern ecclesiastic. "Access to the best," he almost hissed the words. "I didn't find the approaches crowded, even in the West End."

But Chapman did not insist on the "shepherd" or the "sheep." He pulled his left trouser-leg up to his knee, with the old athletic interest in anything to do with muscle and bone, and showed me a terrific ragged white scar, running almost all the way up from the ankle.

"One of the sheep did that," he remarked grimly.

"Some months ago I was roused about one in the morning by a violent street row. I looked out and saw a crowd round a fight of some sort, but nobody was interfering. I dressed and went out, and saw a man 'kneeing' a woman up against one of the buildings. It infuriated me; so I threw him across the road and prepared for the inevitable. He came straight for me, but I thought I would not strike first. He danced all round me, abusing me like a pickpocket; and I walked all round him, in order to keep facing him. Then there was a rush, and he let fly with a series of kicks, which I seem to have taken mostly on this leg. I suppose I ought to have been prepared for that method of fighting, too; but one can't think of everything. However, he didn't down me. I didn't know there were any fractures till later. Perhaps the angels looked after me—acted as my seconds, you know." He laughed like a schoolboy. "I kept facing him. Finally, he went back into his house and the row seemed to be over." This was only Chapman's way, of course, of describing a very much tougher close to the affair. I heard about it later from one of his colleagues.

"Some time afterwards," he continued, "I saw him and spoke to him as if nothing had passed between us. To my surprise he said quite nicely and seriously, 'I have a Bible with pictures. Would you like to see it?' No, they're not sheep. But they're uncommonly like children in some ways."

I shook my head a little, for I was still confronted by that grim scar on a leg that might once have been a model for a sculptor. He covered it again. "It's time for us to be off to vespers," he said.

We went through the swarming filth of Klondyke Street, and as we passed the third lamp-post, which was on the opposite side of the road, Chapman looked keenly at a white-faced youth who stood leaning against it. "Don't stop," he said, "I want to have a good look at him first." We went a little way down the street. "Wait here," he said. Chapman swung round and returned on the other side. I saw the young man staring at me suspiciously; but, after a few words from Chapman, he lost his hunted look. Only a few sentences passed between them. Then Chapman gave him some money and joined me again, saying, "I'm afraid it's a bad case; he's going to get something to eat, and he'll tell me all about his trouble to-night after you're gone. If it's what I think it is, I may have to tell him I can do no more. But one has to keep up the old idea of 'sanctuary' to a certain extent; and I have to look upon anything they tell me as sacred, or merely on practical grounds I should be useless here. In fact, one of my very best friends is an ex-murderer. I'll tell you about it later."

It was the strangest and, in some ways, the most heart-stirring evening service I had ever seen. The "church" was little more than a ramshackle shed, lighted only by candles, and decorated with pictures gaudier and far cruder than those that appeal to the religious emotions of the Italian peasants. "Color they *must* have down here," said Chapman. This was the explanation, too, of Chapman's own blaze of glory; for he wore his true wedding garments here. The rusty cassock had gone, and he knelt before his tiny altar in spotless white and gold

vestments, a stiffly splendid mediæval saint, looking extraordinarily youthful with his fair Sir Galahad's head. He acted as thurifer and priest; and, as he told me afterwards, with that curious cold-tub frankness of his, the incense that he swung around us served several purposes. It was almost necessary as a fumigant over those forty or fifty bundles of rags—kneeling in the most pitiful and the most moving act of worship that I had ever seen. In some of the faces there were possibilities, especially in those of the children; but, for many of the men and women, there seemed to be very faint hopes of any deliverance on this side of the grave. Those narrow foreheads and degenerate skulls had been shaped by many generations of wrong. I could hardly understand how some of those crooked faces and vicious mouths had been persuaded to come here. Yet they were in deadly earnest for the time. They sang in their harsh voices, and, though there were moments when I could have imagined myself listening to a forlorn cry in the jungle, there were other moments when a hopeless, almost brutal passion seemed to come tearing out of their prisons of flesh, and sent the words—whether they understood them or not—shivering through my own. There was one moment when a child's voice—Chapman had taught her the words himself—pealed over all the others. It was not beautiful. It was more like the cry of a lamb than the voice of a chorister; but it brought tears to the eyes with all the unconscious implications of its simple question,

“Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?”

I didn't know. But Beethoven never shook any soul as that music shook mine; and I was still aching with the sadness of it when we got back to Chapman's house and settled down in his rickety arm-chairs, over a handful of coals, to talk.

We exchanged memories for a time; and then he began to tell me, as he had promised, about his friend, the murderer. He told me the whole story, without any of the false emphasis of art. He spoke with that curiously even and formal clerical vocabulary which—in Chapman's case at any rate—was better than either the simplifications or subtleties that art might lend to it. For the danger of art is that, except among the greatest, it is too small for life. It fastens on a fragment, rounds you off a tragedy, or a comedy, or a love-story by trimming and shaping its material to ends that are its own. The story that Chapman told me began generations ago, as I tried to suggest in my opening sentences, and all this rambling prelude is really a part of it, as background and atmosphere, if nothing more. Even his formal vocabulary gives you the man better than I can paint him, if you are alive to the fact that behind the professional terms there was a very direct and disingenuous character whom even the murderer desired to shield from the cynicism of his own crude and savage world. Whether his tale can be delivered so directly to the cynicism of our own is perhaps less certain; but this is what he told me, and it is quite certain that he shaped the whole course of his subsequent life upon it.

II

"There was a family in Mayhew Buildings in which I was greatly interested. You saw Mayhew Buildings. They were long ago condemned as unfit for human habitation. The doors are below street level. You step down into the houses, which are mostly of wood and rotten. The backs are even worse than the fronts, and they are all damp and verminous. The Plumridge family lived at number six. It consisted of a father, mother and three children. The woman struck me as being a really good-hearted, kind soul. Edward, the elder boy, was aged six, Billy was five, and there was a little girl about three. I made a great point of seeing a good deal of them, and very soon discovered that these children were all illegitimate. The man was a bachelor, and a lapsed communicant of the church, and the woman was a widow, her former husband having died of consumption. She was unbaptized, and thoroughly unhappy about the state in which they were living. She wanted very much to be married. They had actually saved up for it several times; but, owing to sudden unemployment, had been obliged to use the money for necessities instead. The whole atmosphere of the family was gentle and pleasant. The woman had a soft voice and the children seemed happy. At the back of number three, lived this woman's brother, Jack Masterman, who had a great reputation for violence and independence. Most people seemed to regard him with fear and trembling. He lived with his old mother, a very beautiful old woman, certainly not many years short of ninety.

"Mrs. Plumridge used to endeavor to keep me away from her brother. She knew that he had no use for religion and prided himself that he was an atheist and a skeptic. Though he was never rude, he spoke out of his mind, and I detected in him some very superior origin. I could not help noticing his kind and gentle, but firm way with his old mother.

"I followed up my connection with the Plumridge family and eventually brought them to a real sense of shame in the immoral life they were leading. I told them that if they were living in sin they must give it up at once. The woman, who was the stronger character of the two, wanted to carry out the plan. The man was an amiable, but rather feeble, character. It was decided that he should go and live at the Manor Place lodging house. He foraged for himself and brought what money he had to support the woman who was the mother of his three children. She fed him, but he never spent a night there. The man was under instruction for restoration to communion and the woman was under instruction for holy baptism. She always brought the three children along with her when she came to Sister Ethelreda, a saint on earth, to whom I had introduced her. There was no hitch on either side in the preparation; but the woman wanted the man back because she hated to have him suffer the hardships of the common doss-house. After three months' instruction she was ready in every way that the Church requires for repentance and holy baptism. She was baptized at St. Stephen's, in Sultan Street, and only three or four interested people were

present, the children playing about in the church meanwhile, like puppies.

"After this, the marriage was also fixed for the dinner hour, in order that the man should not have to let the neighbors know by getting a special day off, the idea being that the ceremony was to be the means of restoring them both to grace. The woman had told nobody except her brother Jack and her mother, who were both greatly pleased. The banns had been called, and everything was ready except the ring. In the nicest and most delicate way she asked what should be done about it, her widow's ring had been pawned, 'she 'adn't got none nor no money to get one.'

"I had been very careful all along never to pauperize them. If any money came to them through me, it came through work. The man might have been overpaid for work which I got him, but it always came through work. Well, I made up my mind that I would buy her a ring. I took a measurement of her finger with a little bit of wire, went round to a jeweler in the Walworth Road and bought a small gold ring for about £4. I did not give her this ring, I was going to lend it to her *sine die*. I knew if I gave it, she might one day feel bound to pawn it, but if I lent it I felt I could *trust* her. She'd be hanged before that ring would come off her finger. That's the sort of woman she was. You could absolutely *trust* her.

"They were married at the Church of St. John the Divine, Kennington, and the scene was really a most interesting one. The man and woman stood together, wearing of course their usual soiled clothes,

the woman carrying her three-year-old child, and the two little boys standing in the pew playing with something they had found on the floor.

"They took the signing of the register with tremendous seriousness. I felt that this marriage had a far deeper significance than a society wedding with its West End rot and irreverence. We all felt that we would like to make a thanksgiving to God and the Church, and it afterwards took place at our own little church of St. Stephen's, where you came to-night.

"Things went fairly well with them for a time. The woman had a sense of starting a new life, and the general tone was cleaner and happier all round. Then there came a bad time of unemployment. Plumridge, as a general laborer, was one of the first to be out of work, and he and his wife asked my advice about it. The work of a priest among these poor people is to think for them, to scheme for their daily welfare, as well as to care for their souls. The priest realizes that the body must be cared for, and a great part of his work is to help them to care for it in these times of distress.

"Things were nearly desperate with the Plumridges, and I could only help personally by finding little jobs, such as sending the man out to deliver notes. I told him to apply to the Camberwell Borough Distress Committee for work, which he did, and they gave him some sort of discouraging reply. I went to see the secretary myself. He said Plumridge would have been accepted for the labor colony, but was reported verminous and rejected. Anyone living in those awful buildings would have been

unclean. Jack Masterman was in the same state. But I wasn't going to let it end there; so I said:

" 'If I can arrange to have him cleaned——'

" 'Impossible,' he replied; 'it can't be done.'

" 'I believe it can,' I said.

"After a slight argument he said that Plumridge could be re-examined by the doctor at any time, so I fixed a date four days ahead, took Plumridge along to a cleansing station, and tipped a man a shilling to scour him down. He was stripped of every vestige of clothing he possessed and rigged out in second-hand clothes given by Lancing College. He also had absolutely clean underclothing, but he could not put on his boots, which were left to be sterilized. The man came back from that cleansing station straight to me. His wife agreed that he should not go back to the house before his re-examination by the doctor; and, when that took place a few days later, there was nothing to be found on him, and he was sent to the labor colony in Norfolk. Allowances were at once payable to his wife and children, and he was very fairly happy during the many months he was in Norfolk; a little lonely, he wrote, but glad that his family were getting some money to keep them.

"Some time after, a neighbor of the Plumridges rapped on my door at one in the morning. I went down in my pajamas. He said Mrs. Plumridge was very ill and would I come round. I dressed quickly and went round at once. I knew that she was expecting a baby, but not for a month or so.

"When I got to number six, Mayhew Buildings, and stumbled down into its foul-smelling depths,

there was a flicker of light in a filthy old candlestick, and I took it to light my way. I had never been up to their bedroom, but I opened the door at the head of the stairs.

"The woman, half undressed, was lying lifeless on the ramshackle bed. The rotten mattress and blankets were soaked with blood. It had dripped to the floor and was lying there in a pool. Near the woman lay the body of a new-born baby—dead.

"In a corner on the floor, with a man's old overcoat thrown over them, lay the two little boys in their shirts and trousers, peacefully sleeping. In another corner lay the little three-year-old girl, properly put to bed in her cot—a wooden packing-case—and fast asleep.

"The mother's body was still warm, but I applied the usual tests and made sure she was dead. I thought the best thing to do was to summon Jack Masterman. He came at once, and we held a little council in that room, with the woman and her baby lying dead, and the three sleeping children round them. We decided that he should take the baby girl to her grandmother and that I should take the two little boys back with me to my house. Before we disturbed the children we covered the figure on the bed, and threw some of the woman's clothes over the pool of blood on the floor, that it might not frighten the little boys. We woke up Teddy, the elder one, who did not seem in the least surprised, and put on his jacket, quite ready to be taken away suddenly in the middle of the night. Clearly he had trekked before! I picked up little five-year-old Billy, and carried him in my arms all

the way to my house. He never woke at all, and I deposited him at the foot of my own bed, on one of my pillows, and covered him up. Teddy, who seemed to have complete confidence in me, and showed no surprise at these unusual proceedings, took off his coat and lay down by his side, still in his shirt and trousers. He never took off his shirt to go to bed, he afterwards told me. I had qualms about vermin, but although the things often got on my cassock and elsewhere, they never stayed, and at any rate there was nothing else to be done for that night.

"I got into bed and slept till about six o'clock in the morning, when I got up. I had no service to take, but I wanted to arrange with the housekeeper about giving the boys a good bath and all that kind of thing. Just as I was getting up, there came a knock at the door, and the Vicar of the next parish, Canon Wickham, appeared. He wanted to know if I could take the place of someone who was unable to officiate.

"I shall never forget his look of surprise as his eye lighted on the two sleeping children at the foot of my bed. I explained matters and went out. When I came back both boys were washed and dressed, and most important of all, cleaned, and were having a better breakfast than perhaps ever before. They were asking about 'Mummy,' but otherwise were quite happy. After breakfast I sent a telegram to their father at the labor colony:

"'Very sorry to tell you wife died suddenly. Get leave. Come straight to me will explain all.'"

"Meanwhile I received a visit from Jack Masterman, who asked me in quite an agitated manner:

" 'Have you, sir, taken the ring off Em's finger?'

" 'No,' I replied.

" 'Em told me about it, and I been into the room there which was full of them—blackguards, and I saw that the ring had been taken off her finger. I looked round, took stock of 'em, and said, "Someone 'as took that ring off 'er finger. No one 'as any right to that ring except Mr. Chapman. I dessay it's been took off to spend on two and a 'arf beer. Now then, I'm goin' out for an hour and if that ring ain't back on Em's finger by the time I get back, I'll do in the 'ole lot of you.' "

"I questioned him, and found that I could not shake his facts; and, as he appeared to be very much agitated, I went back with him in order to be present at the scene. There was no one in the room where the corpse lay, which was very unusual, for in this district it is the custom for a stream of neighbors to visit the death-chamber. But—a tribute to Jack's reputation for being a man of his word—the ring was back on the dead woman's finger.

"That afternoon the father arrived, in his working clothes, the only ones he had. He listened patiently to what I had to tell him, saw his small boys, and went back to his brother-in-law's to discuss things, to see his wife's mother, and also, of course, to look at the poor woman before she was buried.

"Discussing the funeral with him later, I found that he had made up his mind to make a collection for it from the neighbors. They are very fond of that sort of thing and are wonderfully generous

to each other when there is a funeral in question.

"I discouraged the idea, saying that it would be a waste to spend the money on one who no longer needed it; and, if he could get any, why not use it for the children?"

" 'Well, what about the buryin'?' he asked.

" 'We will ask the guardians to bury your wife,' I told him.

" 'You mean a bloomin' pauper's funeral?'

" 'Well, yes, but a Christian one. That is the only thing that matters.'

"He finally agreed, and I went to the Relieving Officer with him and applied for a pauper's coffin and burying. An order to a local undertaker was readily given and the funeral was fixed for the dinner-hour three or four days after the death. There was no inquest, since the doctor the woman had been under gave a certificate that she had died in a premature childbirth.

"When once the funeral was fixed, I set about trying to prepare the family for a right understanding of the real significance of Christian burial, and in this connection I had a talk with Jack, over the corpse of his sister Em, as he always called her.

" 'You'll come to the funeral?' I asked.

" 'Well, you've been very kind and I'd like to come becos' you've asked me, but it's no use my comin' becos' I don't believe in it. There's poor Em lyin' there. What is she now? Nothin'. She's washed out, she is.'

"I tried to explain to him that Em was in Paradise, that her soul had left the poor shell of a body that lay before our eyes. He was quite nice, and

fairly polite, but he was firm about not going to the funeral, and he would not let his old mother come either, not for that reason, but because she was so old she could hardly walk. So we settled that the two little boys should come straight from my house and that their father and the neighbors should come direct to the church.

"I was anxious to give this really splendid woman a fitting burial, and although it had to be a pauper's, I determined that it should have all that the Church could give it and that it should be as good a one as if the King of England himself were to be buried from that Church. I asked everyone to do their best to attend the funeral of a communicant of St. Stephen's, and I got a man to come and act as crucifer. Also we arranged to have the organ and to sing her favorite hymn, *Blest are the pure in heart*, I think it was.

"The day came, and there were quite a number of people in the little church. I remember standing just inside the railings as the coffin arrived. There was not a proper hearse, and I noticed how ungainly the coffin looked as it stuck out from the seat next the driver. I wondered whether Jack Masterman would come; and, as they were getting the coffin out, I saw his tall figure standing beyond the railings; but he did not come in.

"When the service was over and the whole party, including the priests in surplice and biretta, had packed into the one conveyance in readiness for Forest Hill cemetery, Jack was no longer visible. On arrival I at once saw that they were taking us to unconsecrated ground, and I told them it was

quite impossible to bury the dead woman there; she must be laid to rest in consecrated ground. Her husband backed me up, and I said we would take the body back to the mortuary, if necessary, and come back the next day. Well, within ten minutes they had opened up a grave in the consecrated ground. When the coffin had been lowered into the grave and the words of committal were being said, I noticed a little way off, on some rising ground, against the sky, the big rough form of the dead woman's brother, Jack Masterman. Evidently the few minutes' delay had given him time to come up with us and witness the final scene, though he would only do so from a distance. But he disappeared shortly after, and the rest of us drove back to Camberwell Green. The husband spent that night either in his own tenement or with his mother-in-law, I don't remember which, and the two little boys came back with me.

"The next day the father came round to discuss his children's future. My housekeeper and I had become very fond of the little boys, who ran about the house like two puppies. It seemed impossible to spoil them; but, of course, it was obvious that they could not stay there. I asked the father whether he would give me a free hand to place them in a suitable home, and whether he could make a regular contribution towards their support. I knew that it would be good for him to have some of the responsibility. He agreed, and we finally arranged that they should go to a home in the country run by the Waifs and Strays people, for which the father was to pay four shillings a week

each. This took several weeks to bring about, and the two little boys stayed at my house the whole of the time. The little girl remained with her grandmother, but she was delicate and did not get on very well. She fell seriously ill later on, and died in the Camberwell Infirmary.

"Meanwhile the boys' departure was something of an event. They seemed to look on me as a father. They had a special tea with me on the last day, before I took them to the London home of the Waifs and Strays. I remember that we walked as far as the Oval, and they played with a ball that came out of my pocket. Then we took a tram to the home, where they were pleased to see the other children, but clung very close to me. I said good-by, and they howled like fun. After that they were sent on to the home in the country, where the father visited them once or twice. Their uncle, Jack Masterman, also used systematically to save up his money for that purpose. He took a great interest in them, and would tell me how much better it was for them to be there than playing about in the streets, and how glad he was they had the opportunity of being in the home. I kept in close touch with Masterman and tried to bring him round to a clear view of the teaching of the Church. But it seemed impossible to move his mind, and although he had no education he had a remarkable grasp of things and was wonderfully able in argument on politics and religion. I remember, once, when there was an increase in the tax on tobacco, he took his pipe and ground it under his heel, saying he would give up smoking rather than pay a tax which he

thought was wrong. I should not have been surprised had he given up his beer for the same reason.

"His neighbors appeared to rouse his ire, for he was always complaining about them, especially of a man called James Newbery. I knew both Newbery and his wife, as I thought her at first, and the children; but I afterwards discovered that Newbery had a wife living with another man somewhere else, and that the woman who was living with Newbery had a husband who was living somewhere else with yet another woman.

"Jack Masterman used to tell me that Newbery ill-treated the woman he was living with, and that sounds of quarrels and blows in the night came to him through the thin dividing walls of the tumble-down buildings. I could well believe it, for often when I was talking to the families living there, they would drop their voices if talking of something private, with a warning look at the walls. Jack often threatened violence to James Newbery, but all his talk was of such a violent nature that I did not think anything would come of it.

"Shortly afterwards, word reached me that Mrs. Newbery had hanged herself. It was in the morning, the children were at school, and I asked the teacher to contrive to keep them there during the dinner-hour that they might not come home and be met by any dreadful scenes. One gets accustomed to take in the situation and make little arrangements like that. I went to Mayhew Buildings, but they had just taken the body to the mortuary. I then went round and saw Jack.

" 'What d'you think 'appened to me?' he said.

'I was walkin' down the court, when Jim Newbery says to me, with tears in 'is eyes, "Look there," 'e says. I looked, and saw 'is woman hanging by 'er neck. I went and cut 'er down, and I turned to that blackguard and I said, "You done it," I said, "and I'll be square with you for it."'

"I made no comment, but said that we must wait for the inquest.

"'As sure as anythin' could ever be, Jim Newbery done 'er in,' declared Jack solemnly. 'If 'e found 'er 'angin' like that, why the hell didn't 'e cut 'er down 'isself, instead of getting me to do it?'

"I was not called at the inquest. A verdict of suicide was returned; there was no mention of murder, for Jack had apparently made up his mind to be square with Newbery in his own fashion. 'Either I'll do 'im in, or 'e'll do me,' he used to say, but I never took it seriously.

"One Saturday morning, however, about eleven o'clock, Jack's old mother came round to tell me that Jack had murdered Jim Newbery, and had been taken by the police to Carter Street, while Newbery himself had been taken to King's College Hospital.

"I was terribly sorry to get this news. It seemed as if a great friend had committed this sin, and I went off at once to see James Newbery in the hospital. I found him being kept alive by oxygen, and quite rational, but the sister-in-charge, who knew me well, told me that he could not live. He had been stabbed in the chest five times. I ministered as a priest to him, and then went straight to Brixton Prison where I asked to see Jack Masterman. He

was brought into the room, and I talked to him over a table in the presence of a warder. I knew that I must say nothing to suggest his line of evidence, and I did not attempt to do so. He greeted me fairly cheerfully.

“‘I have some good news for you,’ said I. ‘James Newbery is alive. I hope he may recover.’

“‘What?’ said Jack.

“‘He is alive.’

“His expression absolutely nonplussed me. ‘Then I’ve failed in my deliberate purpose,’ he said. ‘You know they took me and put me in front of him.’

“‘For evidence?’ I said. ‘In order that he might say, in the presence of witnesses, that you were the man who stabbed him?’

“‘I suppose so. But I said to the doctor: “As for you, sir, if you save that man you save the biggest blackguard in Camberwell.” Then the police brought me here.’

“I tried to point out to him the seriousness of what he had done. If the charge of murder were proved, there was nothing for it but hanging. It didn’t seem to dismay him. His great anxiety was about his mother and I promised to look after her.

III

“Two days after, James Newbery died in hospital, and of course the verdict at the inquest was one of willful murder.

“While Jack Masterman was awaiting his trial, I saw him frequently; and, always taking the point of view that his sentence would be death, I thought

that my work lay in preparing him for that. I made better friends with him, but I do not think I ever impressed him with the real facts of the Christian faith. He told me he had been asked what defense he would like to make, and what witnesses he would like to be called, but he would not have his old mother called or even myself. It had been suggested to him that he should plead not guilty, but, 'What's the good of saying that?' he asked me. 'It's a lie. I killed James Newbery, and I 'ope either they'll let me out or else they'll 'ang me. I don't want the other thing.'

"When his trial came on at the Old Bailey, the police and various neighbors gave evidence regarding the actual facts of the murder. It was a very clear case. Masterman was given an opportunity of making his defense. He pleaded guilty. A fine-looking man, he gave his evidence well, and impressed the jury, but there was no sign of repentance whatever. He spoke as a man who knew what his fate would be and had made up his mind to face it. In fact, while actually in the dock, he was seen drawing on a piece of paper, and when it was examined it turned out to be a rough sketch of a gallows with a man hanging on it.

"There was no evidence whatever to show that he had ever had any immoral relations with the wife of James Newbery, who had been found hanging from the stairs. There appeared to be no motive except a real dislike of James Newbery, and a wish to execute what he considered to be justice upon him and—rather quaintly—a wish to shield his old mother from Newbery's noisy habits. The jury

found him guilty, with a recommendation to mercy, probably on account of the extraordinarily open way he gave his evidence; but he was sentenced to death and taken to the condemned cells at Wandsworth. I visited him there, again doing all I could to prepare him for being hanged. After about three weeks, a representative of the Home Office arrived and read to him his reprieve.

"Jack showed no enthusiasm.

" 'You don't look very pleased,' said the Home Office official.

" 'No more am I,' replied Jack, 'with penal servitude for life.'

"His one suit of working clothes, worn all the time he was awaiting his trial, was then taken away and sold, and he was allowed to keep the money, one shilling, all that he would ever be able to earn. They were in bad condition, certainly, but his boots were only about a month old, and, as Jack said, were worth seven and sixpence of anybody's money, and it was a scandal of scandals. Then he had to make up his mind what he would do with the only shilling he had in the world, and he was allowed to write to his mother and inclose it.

" 'My dear mother,' ran the letter, 'I am sending you a shilling in stamps. That is what my clothes was sold for. My great sorrow is that I shall not be able no more to help support you. This is all the money I have or will ever get I am sending it to you.
Jack.'

"He was taken to Parkhurst. I visited his old mother as often as I could; and, as she was clearly

failing, I arranged for her to go to the Camberwell Infirmary. She was afterwards transferred from there to Eastern Road Workhouse Infirmary. She had a delusion that only she and I knew that Jack was doing a life-sentence, and I didn't discourage it. In the first period of strict discipline Jack was allowed to write once every two months if there was nothing put against him, and he always wrote to me knowing that I would at once see his old mother, for whom I always used to answer the letter in question. She was getting weaker and weaker, and you can imagine the situation, the poor old soul dying in the workhouse infirmary, and her only son doing a life-sentence in prison.

"Then it was that I had an inspiration of the angels. I made up my mind to approach the guardians and ask whether, on a fine and convenient day, they would allow the old lady out for the afternoon to have her photograph taken for Jack. The doctor said 'yes,' and I arranged that a lady should fetch her on the appointed day and take her to Brown's, the photographer's in the Walworth Road, and bring her on to my house for tea. It all went off successfully, the photograph was excellent and showed her with a happy smile. Not long afterwards, she grew weaker and died, and when I wrote to tell Jack, I was glad to be able to tell him about the photograph. She was buried at Forest Hill; and, like her daughter, she had a pauper's funeral.

"A few days later I got this letter from Jack."

Chapman handed me a document of severely official outward appearance, with the rules and regu-

lations of prison correspondence, printed on the outside sheet, thus:

"V In replying to this letter please write on the envelope:—

154. Number P. 209 Name J. Masterman, Parkhurst Prison, Isle of Wight.

"The following regulations as to communications, by Visit or Letter, between prisoners and their friends are notified for information of their correspondents.

"The permission to write and receive letters is given to prisoners for the purpose of enabling them to keep up a connection with their respectable friends and not that they may be kept informed of public events.

"All Letters are read by the Prison Authorities. They must be legibly written and not crossed. Any which are of an objectionable tendency, either to or from prisoners, or containing slang, or improper expressions, will be suppressed.

"Prisoners are permitted to receive and write a letter at intervals, which depend upon the rules of the stage they attain by industry and good conduct; but matters of special importance to a prisoner may be communicated at any time by letter (prepaid) to the Governor who will inform the prisoner thereof, if expedient."

The letter within, written in a large, clear, school-boyish hand, ran as follows:

"December 2nd, 1918.

"Dear Sir,

"In answering your kind and welcome letter, I wish to return my most Heartfelt thanks for you thinking of me. It is quite true my poor Old Mother is dead her age was 95½ but there I shall be 70 in may next. Sir I will tell you something strange that happened to me about that time I was walking up and down my cell on Saturday the 28th of Sept.

last. When I heard a strange creaking nock on my beadstead and a very cold sencation that made me step aside. And on the Saturday night I had a dream that I was walking down the Walworth Road when my sister came running up to me against Red Lion her words where Jack your Mother is dead then she vanished. Now sir you know that my sister is been dead close on five years and you read the Burial Service at the Grave when she was buried and I wish you had done the same at my poor Old Mothers Burial for I know it would have been her wish if she had anythink to do with it. Then I ask the Chaplin of the Prison if he would make inquiries and he wrote twice once about a Photo she had there of my sisters three Children but the Matron said it could not be found of course I was very sorry for I sent it to her from this Prison with the Shilling they sold my clothes for. Now sir you ask me about my Mothers photo. Yes Sir I have one allright but I hope you will not destroy yours for we never know what might happen. Sir now about my Sisters two poor little Boys I went down to Maidstone to see them and they were quite comfortable and happy. But I expect they where going to take him for a Soldier and he was frightened and he took them from a good home to save himself from going. But Plumridge's Mother is a Roman Catholic and I expect she has got them into some of their schools. Sir concerning getting an order to visit me it would be the best to write to the Home Office direct my correct number and address is P. 209 John Masterman Parkhurst Convict Prison Isel of wight. Sir you would have to ask in your letter for an hours Visit or it would only be 20 minutes now concerning the Influenza I am very glad to read that you excaped it and so far I have myself but it is shocking bad in this prison. Sir it might interest you to know that I never mist one day writing to my Poor Old Mother when I was allowed to but now I have not a relation on Earth only them two Poor little Boys of my Sisters and of course if I knew where they where I

should never think of writing to them from here Sir I can say no more I have Sir.

"the Honor to remain

"(Signed) JOHN MASTERMAN."

"to the

Rev. Mr. Chapman."

IV

"After his mother's death Jack wrote to me every two months without exception, but some months elapsed before I was able to let him see the photograph. It happened this way: I received a letter from an officer of the W. A. A. C.'s, who was in charge of a unit at Parkhurst, asking me if I knew of a little slum girl whom they could entertain for a fortnight's holiday in the country. Did I know of one!

"I at once connected the little girl's holiday at Parkhurst with Jack Masterman. The angels arrange these things, of course. I thanked the W. A. A. C. officer and asked, supposing I found the money to pay the fare, would they be able to find quarters for two little girls, to be company for each other? They said 'yes, certainly,' and they would pay both fares. Then, having found the two little slum girls, who had to be healthy and clean, there came the difficulty of the two children traveling alone, and their getting over to the Isle of Wight. I decided that they must have a nurse-maid, and that I would act in that capacity.

"The two little girls selected were members of an extremely nice slum school which has for many years done wonderful work in that district. The school

was kindness itself in finding suitable clothing for the children, whose portmanteau consisted of a brown paper bag, packed nevertheless with sufficient clothing for their fortnight's stay. At nine o'clock on a June morning the two little girls were waiting at the Clergy House, looking tidiness itself, and overflowing with happiness. I had interested a friend of mine (a brother-parson) in the trip, as he had more cash than I had, and it was he who paid the expenses.

"We made our way to Waterloo and found ourselves in the train for Portsmouth. It was a beautiful day and the children were full of delight. They declared, while crossing over to Ryde, that they distinctly saw a large fish over the side of the ship, an effort of imagination which showed how much they were enjoying themselves. Arrived at Newport, we asked for the W. A. A. C. camp. The children, now rather shy and quiet, were warmly welcomed by the kind-hearted W. A. A. C.'s, who promised to see them safely across the water and into the train home at the end of their fortnight.

"I went straight on to see Jack Masterman, the prison being only about a quarter of a mile from the W. A. A. C. camp. I had no permit to see him, but went straight to the Governor and asked if I might see him for as long as possible on that day, and again on the following morning. The Governor made some inquiries as to how long the man had been in prison and how many visitors he had seen. The report was that he had never seen any at all, so the Governor at once gave permission for me to see him for an hour that day, and for another hour

the next morning, and also granted the privilege of seeing him in a special room.

"I also asked whether I could give him the new photograph of his mother. I had got the school children to frame it in gelatine, as I knew that glass could not be given to a convict. The Governor said 'yes,' but it would have to be handed over to himself, in order that it might receive the official stamp. However he finally said I might show Jack the photograph and bring it back to his office, where it would receive the official stamp and it would then be handed to Jack.

"Jack was brought, first of all, to the prison gates. There was an air of surprise about him, as if he was astonished that I should come and see him.

" 'How awfully well you look,' I said.

" 'So I ought, in this beautiful air, with plenty to eat and drink, very plain, and allus the same-like, but plenty of it. There ain't no beer——' and we both smiled in recollection of past history. Jack, however, had never been a heavy drinker, and, as he afterwards told me, he missed his 'baccy far more than his beer.

"We were then conducted by the warder into the special room where the interview was to take place: The warder, a pleasant-looking young fellow, was in a corner, Jack on one side of the table, and I on the other. Jack was full of chat about local affairs and business, and also wanted to hear all the details of his old mother's death.

"I wanted to use the hour to the man's spiritual advantage; so I set my watch on the table, deter-

mined when Jack had finished his innings, that I would get in mine."

Watch on the table!—Chapman's way of using the phrase showed me again that all this was only a development of the old athletics. How often we had counted the last seconds out together, from the minute-gun to the starting of the race. The old habits of precision were still serving him. He smiled as I looked up, "Yes, *you* remember." Then he resumed.

"Jack asked me about his little nephews, Teddy and Billy Plumridge. All his affection for his sister Em seemed to flow out to her small boys, and when he asked me to tell him where they were at the moment, he said he hoped I should understand that he would never disgrace them by writing to them from prison.

"Then he began to give me details of the crime that had brought on him the life-sentence he was now serving. I broke in with an attempt to point once more the awfulness of the sin of murder; but, although he was sorry, he seemed to think that what he had done was beneficial to mankind in general.

" 'This young man here is a murderer, too,' he said suddenly, with a glance at the warder in the corner.

"I turned round and saw the young man smiling, apparently not in the least offended.

" ' 'E's been away killing Germans. I killed Jim Newbery, and I reckon I did a better job than what 'e did. The man I killed was worse than any German.'

"When he had held the conversation for about forty minutes, I made another attempt to do most of the talking. I had come with earnest intentions to bring him the ministrations of the Church, and I wanted to awaken in him a real desire for spiritual things. I thought I would trace out his history from the beginning, and I pointed out what he had received in baptism.

" 'I never been baptized,' he said, looking up.

"I was much surprised, as I had always thought he had been baptized; his mother gave me the impression that she would have been careful to see to that, in spite of her poverty.

" 'Well, you see, I was a nat'ral child,' continued Jack.

"I was again surprised. 'You never told me that before,' I said. 'I thought you had told me everything. Your mother never told me either.'

" 'No, I never did tell you that, sir,' he said rather apologetically. 'Never in the lifetime of that old girl would I have said anything that could ever shame her.'

"At this point I showed him the photograph I had brought, and explained how it had been taken, and how it would be given to him through the official channels in due course.

"His eyes filled with tears as he thanked me for what he said would be the greatest treasure he could have.

"The hour's interview was over, and I was not to see Jack again till the next day. When I did see him, there were a great many other things he had thought of, and he had many questions to ask. He

asked after the butcher for whom he used to work, and a child called Lily Meader. He said how miserable he was in prison, and how he had no hopes whatever of coming out, and how he hated the thought of dying here and being buried in the prison burying-ground. He was sixty-five when he committed the crime, and was now nearly seventy. I asked him did he miss things very much.

“‘When I was took to the prison gates to see you yesterday, sir,’ he said, ‘it was the fust time I seed the main road since I came ’ere, between four and five years ago. I don’t miss beer, but I dream about my ’baccy.’

“‘I wanted to tell you,’ he continued, ‘about one of the men ’ere, as I asked once to read me one of your letters, as wasn’t very clear. I’m afraid ’e took a copy of your address, and I’m afraid of my life ’e’ll come and worry you as soon as ’e gets out. I wish I’d never shown him your letter at all.’

“I rather wondered how Jack had managed to establish communication with a fellow convict, but I forebore to ask, merely thanking him for his warning, which showed a certain solicitude on his part. As a matter of fact, the fellow did approach me as soon as he got out, and I kept him for a meal at the Clergy House, but I was able to assure Jack that he had got no money out of me, and that I had quite definitely summed him up. There may be a certain gullibility about a priest, but we are not to be had on every occasion.

“When I shook hands with Jack on saying good-bye, he thanked me with great warmth for coming to see him. I felt I had been talking to a man of real

character and nobility, a man who would have been more fit to be Prime Minister of England than a convict, if he had had a chance. It was one of the calamities brought about by the power of evil in the world.

V

"I returned to my ordinary life, and he to his prison cell with its daily routine of dullness and misery. He wrote to me every two months as before, and I tried in reply to give him little bits of news that I thought might interest him. I remember that when I went to the north of England to sell a house and furniture for two aged relatives, the scene the day after the sale reminded me of Camberwell, with the dealers carting off miscellaneous articles on hand-barrows, and I mentioned it in my letter to Jack. His solicitude was again apparent in his reply, which expressed an earnest hope that they had not done me down over the sale. 'I guess, however,' his letter continued, 'they picked your bones clean.'

"Another time, when I had been staying with my aged mother I mentioned it in my letter to Jack, which called forth a nice little homily from him about my mother 'being the only real reliable friend that a man could have. Every other friend has a price, but a mother will always be faithful.'

"It would not be an exaggeration to say that this man had been in my mind and my prayers numbers of times every day, for years. My great hope and prayer was that he would in time express a real desire for Holy Baptism.

"In September, 1920, I had three days put aside

to visit Jack at Parkhurst, and had written for an order to see him. I received it and told Jack I was coming, but an unforeseen event made it impossible for me to get away just then.

"No other opportunity of seeing Jack arose until just before Lent, 1921, when I had a holiday for the inside of a week, so on the first of February I went down to Parkhurst. I had written to Jack, two or three days before, to say I was coming, that my train was due at Newport at three o'clock, and that I would come straight to the prison to see him. I knew that one might not see convicts after four o'clock, so I made haste and asked to see him. The warder at the gate fell in with my request and asked if I had a special permit. I said I had nothing more than the permit which I produced.

" 'Would you like to see him in a special room?' he asked.

"I thought this might take time to arrange in a hurry, so I said an ordinary one would do.

"I then saw him as convicts are ordinarily visited. He was standing in a small apartment into which he had been locked behind bars. I was asked to sit down in an outer room, but behind a sort of counter about four or five feet wide. In the dividing space between us sat the warder. It was nothing like such a comfortable situation for discussion as we had been allowed before, but I think he enjoyed it none the less. I did more talking than before, and tried more to instruct him in spiritual matters, especially regarding the Sacraments of the Church. The permit allowed for half an hour, but this interview was allowed to prolong itself to a good hour, and

I believe and trust that it was some help to Jack.

"The warder said that the Governor was out, but that if I were to see the Assistant Governor about a permit for the next morning he might be able to give it. Jack seemed to think it would be wiser to see the Governor, so I said I would make a point of doing so. I could not shake hands with Jack, as the intervening space forbade it, but they let him come out into the courtyard, after unlocking him, and I shook hands on saying good-by out there.

"I had been told that the Governor was out beagling, and my estimation of him at once rose, for his choice of healthy recreation was one of which I entirely approved. Jack spoke well of him, and I made up my mind I would call on him after supper, and make my request. However, as I walked along the road away from the prison, I saw coming towards me a man who looked as if he had been beagling, covered with mud, and rather weary, and I at once asked, was he the Governor.

"He said that he was, and I asked whether it would be possible to see Jack the next morning. He asked what was the man in prison for, and I replied murder.

" 'Oh, is he an old man, who has been a gardener?'

" 'He's old enough, but he's a knife-sharpener by trade, though he has done all sorts of things.'

"I explained my desire for a really long visit in a special room where we could talk a little more comfortably than through iron bars and gratings, adding that I should very much appreciate it if he would allow me to go over the prison

"He replied that there were yards and yards of

red tape to cut through, but it would be all right.

"At half past nine the next morning I was again at the prison gates and found that the Governor had detailed someone to take me round the prison, and into every part of it. I recognized no less than three convicts, and I rather think that more than that number recognized *me*, though I could not be quite sure. I was taken all over the punishment cells and the ordinary cells. The differences in their tidiness and untidiness were very marked. I noticed the rather pathetic appearance of photographs in some of the cells. The prison bread was some of the best I have ever tasted, and the whole system of the prison dietary was explained to me. The workshops were extraordinarily interesting, there was a leather shop, where they were boot-making, and bag-making, a wood-working and an engineering shop. I noticed that in all the various shops there were some prisoners standing and doing nothing—Sinn Feiners, who were not obliged to work, and who, in fact, refused to do so, side by side with the ordinary convicts.

"Most of the men looked quite contented and accepted their fate in a philosophic way, though some were apt to mumble grievances as I walked slowly past them.

"The only rather dull spot in the whole prison, and one which you would have thought they would try to make the brightest of all, was the Chapel. There was immense room for improvement in it, and it was quite unworthy of the Catholic Apostolic Church.

"After being taken over the prison, I saw the

Governor, who was very kind. There was one particular shop he wanted me to see, he said, and he would take me himself. I said I didn't want Jack to miss his dinner by waiting for me. The Governor very kindly said he would have it kept hot for him, and the man would not mind, so he at once gave an order to a warder about Jack's dinner, which was thoughtful of him.

"When at last I saw Jack, it was in a special room, and we were able to sit round a fire, with the warder and his loaded rifle pacing within earshot.

"Jack said he did so hope to be buried outside the prison walls. I told him I understood, and as he had given my name as his 'next of kin,' if I were alive when he died in prison, I would do my best to see that he was buried at Forest Hill with his old mother. But I pointed out that the money needed to bring his body to London could be less wastefully used.

" 'A man doin' five years who dies durin' that sentence, 'is body is a convick's, and 'e's nat'rally buried 'ere,' said Jack earnestly. 'But I'm 'ere for life, an' when I'm dead, I've served my sentence, and my body's free to go outside.'

"I felt that the official ruling on that point might not agree, but I could not help seeing the force of Jack's argument.

"Regarding the possibility of his release, Jack's attitude was more hopeful than when I had seen him eighteen months before.

" 'I do want to die outside of 'ere,' he continued. 'I never told no lies at all about the murder; but I would tell one to get out of this 'ere prison.'

"I thought I had better break into this conversation, and I said, 'You know, Jack, these thoughts have been running in my mind, too. If you were to come out of prison, could you keep off the drink?'

" 'Yes, easy; I should never touch it. I don't miss it 'ere, but I should dearly like to 'ave a smoke.'

" 'I don't think we had better talk about that,' I replied. 'You had better leave it entirely in my hands. It may take a very long time.'

" 'Yes, sir, I understand. I'm quite content to do that.'

"Our interview lasted about two hours, and I felt that I had really been refreshed by this talk with him. He had told me that I was not to write to him for four months, as I had written one too many—in error—which was against the regulations. He would write to me during the following month, which he did, but I was not to answer until I got the next, two months later.

"All this time, of course, I had really only one thought at the back of my mind—and that was to get Jack out of prison. I'd told the authorities that I believed in the man, and that I would take him into my own employment, in my own house, if he were released. He had won golden opinions by his behavior at Parkhurst. I was determined to get him out, sooner or later, and—this very morning—I received word that if I would personally look after him, see that he did not touch alcoholic liquors, and take him into my employment, I could have him.

"It has helped me to decide about another matter. I've been here for fifteen years; and they think I've had enough of it. I'm showing signs of fag, and

they think it's time to put fresh blood into it, I suppose." (The real reason, of course, was that Chapman was working himself to death; just as in the old days he would always be "rowed out" at the finish; though "stroke," till the very last moment, should have a spurt in him.) "Of course, there are other things, too." My eye wandered to a very charming photograph on his mantelpiece. He smiled. "Yes, I think we shall be happier, knowing that we've put in a good day's work down here. It's a very quiet little country vicarage; and Jack is to be gardener, after all."

The extraordinary thing about the whole business was that this really did seem to be the deciding factor. There were things in life for which he had delayed love and marriage. There were other things—even if it were only the rescue of one castaway—which would enable him to accept his happiness. This singular young man (for although he was forty, he was still Sir Galahad in appearance) had an amazing protective affection for his friend, the murderer. So, apparently, had the murderer for Sir Galahad. There would certainly be no swindling over the garden produce of one vicarage in the world.

"By the bye," said Chapman, over the cold beef and pickles which his housekeeper set before us for supper, "I ferreted out a few facts about Jack's origin. His mother, as quite a poor girl, was led astray by a wealthy young fool from Oxford, who took her up to London and left her adrift there. She had a rotten life of it afterwards; but she did subsequently marry some wastrel or other. Jack

was the only illegitimate child; and he was her only support, except that, at one time, she earned a little by sweeping a crossing. Em Plumridge and the others were all legitimate, but they couldn't look after her as Jack did. Well, thank God, the sentence about the sins of the fathers isn't the whole truth."

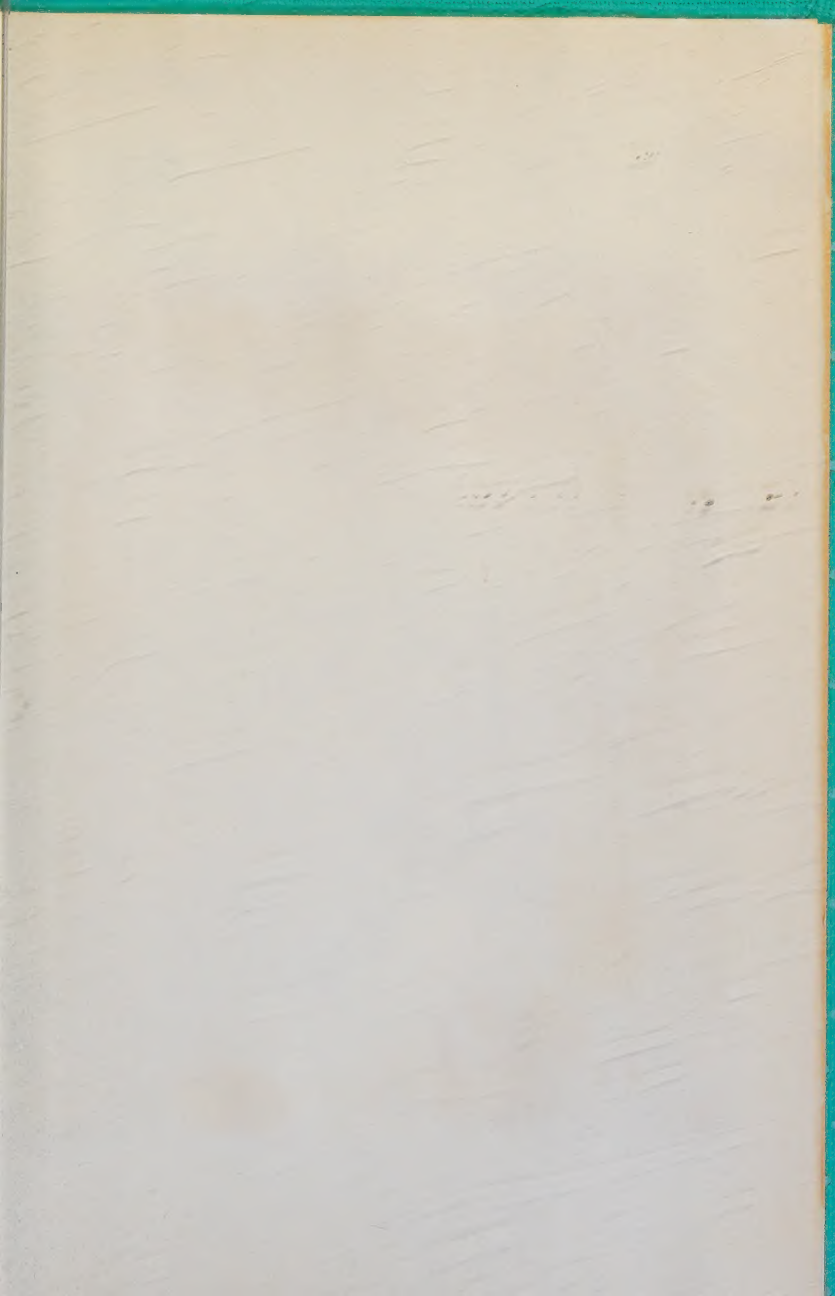
It isn't, of course, more than a fragment of the truth. That is why this tale has rambled from point to point, endeavoring to suggest a myriad ramifications. It can't be rounded off. The father, John Rowlandson, of Harrow and Oxford, died twenty years ago, in quite an exalted position. There were long obituary notices in the newspapers, while the son, in one of the worst slums of London, was moving towards his own horrible destiny. But it was queer, wasn't it, that Oxford should find him again?

Even so, before one could call it "a happy ending," one would have to be like Chapman's angels, who regard all our tales as episodes in a very much larger drama. In fact, my last glimpse of the young man with the hunted eyes, who slipped furtively into Chapman's room as I left, suggested that I was forgetting something of importance, something intimately connected—though I could not trace the connection—with the life of Jack Masterman, and that the real tale was merely beginning. In my helpless philosophy, that thief in the night—or murderer, for all I knew—was one of the necessary keys to the inscrutable mystery about which our modern art in its endeavors after realism so consistently lies. But all that I could take away with me, and all that it is possible to convey here, is just the vivid sense that he gave me of the unending and infinitely com-

plicated interweaving of human lives. Detached from the web of things as art would order it, he must stand here as he stands in my memory of that evening, a denial of the end. For how could he be forgotten—that white-faced creature in rags, creeping out of the underworld into the little circle of the lamp for a moment, like a detached fragment of the unfathomable night beyond; a furtive ambassador; and perhaps, therefore, (as Chapman's angels might see him) a broken word of the Lord.

THE END



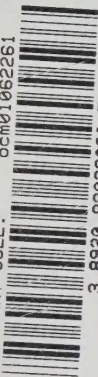


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